

# **The Survivor:**

**The Autobiography  
of Harry Kabran**

**“You Have to Fight to Survive”**

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**“You Have to Fight to Survive”**

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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of my family, friends, and the millions of other innocent people who were killed in the Holocaust.

## My Promise

My whole family was murdered by Hitler. I was the only survivor. In the army, I gave all my efforts and time to fight those murderers. I felt it was my duty to get revenge. I fought to clear my conscience for still being alive. I did what I could and should.

# Preface

In 1977, "Roots", the history of one American Black family, aired on TV. In this series, Alex Haley recounted the story of his family's origins as free people in Africa, their hardship as slaves and their subsequent struggles to survive under the "Jim Crow" laws and segregation many generations later. Like many others, I was moved by the series and became curious about my own heritage. Throughout the 1980's I inquired about my family's "roots": Aunt Pauline Dolgin sent letters, Aunt Esther Abrams related stories and Uncle Herman Dolgin shared information with me.

I went to university libraries and found old maps and books about "our town." Often the information was written in Yiddish and had to be translated. Sometimes the geographical names were written in Polish, sometimes Russian, and most recently in Belarussian. It was all very confusing and very little of it fit together. My family encouraged me to call Cousin Harry, who had grown up in Europe and had lived the story I wanted to hear.

I really didn't know Harry at that time. I had only met him a few times and that was in my childhood. But in 1990 I called him in Florida and asked if he would answer a few questions about our family's life in Europe. He immediately invited me and my father to come stay with him in Florida. We spent two weeks there as Harry's guests.

When we settled down in his living room, I set up my tape recorder and waited for him to begin. He went to his bedroom and came out with a tattered notebook which contained his autobiography. He sat down and read into the microphone for over ten hours. I was moved by this story of unimaginable hardships and personal bravery. I was also touched by the power and simplicity of Harry's writing. His biography was logical, detailed, chronological and poignant. I was surprised that someone could record such a life story without losing track of events or going back to make additions, but there it was. It remains the skeleton for this volume. The spelling, grammar and sentence structure have been revised many times and additional incidents, maps, photographs and historical events have been included, but the story is basically as he read it from his notebook. When he read about the destruction of Bereza and the murder of his family he was overcome by grief and tears. We all sat quietly, reliving the sorrow.

During the next seven years Harry and I met several times, spoke on the telephone regularly and exchanged an endless stream of revisions. We both visited libraries and tracked down many missing pieces of the puzzle. The experience was wonderful and inspiring. While helping Harry preserve his life I was tracing my own "roots."

Harry's life is a remarkable story that deserves to be retold. Where others gave up and died he persevered by relying on his inner resources. How many of us could have survived the horrors of war and the atrocities of inhuman incarceration which Harry experienced and not become warped with hatred or crippled with bitterness? Yet Harry survived and succeeded. His courage and bravery provide lessons for us. His life has been empowered by a positive and powerful philosophy. He puts only nourishing food in his body and optimistic thoughts in his mind. His beliefs have served him well.

As remarkable and inspiring as Harry's life story is, this book is much more than the record of one man's life. It is the history of our family, of our town, and of Eastern European Jewry. He describes the lives of the Jews of Bereza before World War II. We learn about their jobs, their homes and their daily lives. He also describes their murders at the hands of the Nazi "einsatzgruppen" or mobile killing squads. By telling us about Bereza he portrays the life and death of the Jewish people of Eastern Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

Even now there are those who argue that the Holocaust never happened, that only a few Jews were killed or that the atrocities were somehow justified. This book serves as one more piece of evidence against those lies. Harry recorded his story on video for Steven Spielberg's Visual History Foundation of the Survivors of the Shoah. His video is available from the foundation, from Harry and from Howard Dolgin.

In a more universal sense Harry's story is a personal testimony to the destruction and death which are the direct result of intolerance and hatred. Hitler didn't invent anti-Semitism, he only gave voice to existing prejudices and provided the mechanism for people to act on their hatred. Many Germans and other Europeans participated willingly and even eagerly in the slaughter. Many others, although they did not personally commit atrocities, shared Hitler's beliefs and supported his policies and actions.

I believe that the perpetrators of these crimes were neither sub-human nor bestial. They were often respected members of communities where anti-Semitism was commonplace and had been so for centuries. This acceptance of prejudice is the first and necessary step toward violence. Once any group is seen as different and deserving of hate and punishment, then overt violence becomes reasonable, acceptable and even laudatory. All that is necessary for intolerance to evolve into violence is for the hate-filled rhetoric to go unanswered.

I have learned many lessons from collaborating with Harry on his autobiography. I have learned about tenacity and courage. I have learned about my family and my heritage and I have also learned about the necessity for opposing intolerance. I have gained a deeper appreciation of how fortunate I am to live in the United States. Most of all I have come to know and admire my cousin Harry. His life has been a battle in the war against hatred and persecution and this book records that struggle. The story of Harry's life is important and should not be forgotten. It teaches us that hatred can lead to persecution and genocide and must be opposed.

Howard Dolgin

# Acknowledgements

This book would not exist in this format without the expertise, dedication and hard work of Carol E. Smythe. A former professional editor, she read the manuscript and revised it at least a dozen times. It became as much a part of her life as it has become a part of my life. Many times she labored over it through the night and into the morning, always trying to make it as readable as possible without losing Harry's "voice." This book's readability is the result of her work. She viewed Harry's story as a gem that needed to be slowly and carefully polished. I thank her for her dedication, skill and work.

Herman Dolgin, Bernice Beloff, Pauline Dolgin and Esther Abrams contributed information about our family. Alan Rosenwinkel and Raymond Dirmauskas helped with the photos, maps, and layout. Adrienne Dolgin and Sylvia Dolgin helped proofread the final editions. Rochelle Kutner typed the first draft of the book. Trudy Dolgin and Danny Kroogman provided encouragement throughout the process. They all deserve thanks for their contributions.

Much of the factual information about Bereza came from a book entitled *Pinkas Pruz'any and Its Vicinity*. A "pinkas" is a book written by the survivors of a town to preserve and honor the memory of their slain friends and relatives. Bereza is one of six small towns that is located near the town of Pruzana. The book is primarily written in Yiddish, with important sections also recorded in English. It would most likely be located in the library of a rabbinical school, Jewish university or museum. Its library call number is:

Ref  
DS  
135  
R93  
P785  
1983

The video tape of Harry's story was made by the Survivors of the Shoah. For additional information their address and phone number are:

Survivors of the Shoah  
Visual History Foundation  
P. O. Box 3168  
Los Angeles, CA 90078-3168  
1-800-661-2092

A copy of the video tape can also be obtained from:

Harry Kabran      or  
Saxony North  
655 King's Point  
Del Rey, FL 33446

Howard Dolgin  
314 Wellesley Road  
Philadelphia, PA 19119

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# Introduction

My intention in writing this book is to tell my own relatives, especially those in the next generation, what happened to the Jews, and to our family and friends, during the Nazi massacre in Europe. The memories of the way I lost my friends and family- father, mother, brothers, sisters, and relatives and their heroic fight for their lives against the Nazis, are unforgettable and still vivid in my mind. I still think of how the Nazis surrounded the Jewish ghetto in the town of Bereza and took the people out to the woods and shot them or buried them alive. I remember how determined I was to contribute to the effort to defeat Hitler and his barbarous army. This is the story of my life. I am writing it so that people can learn from the things that I have seen and done. People must never forget the atrocities that resulted from hatred.

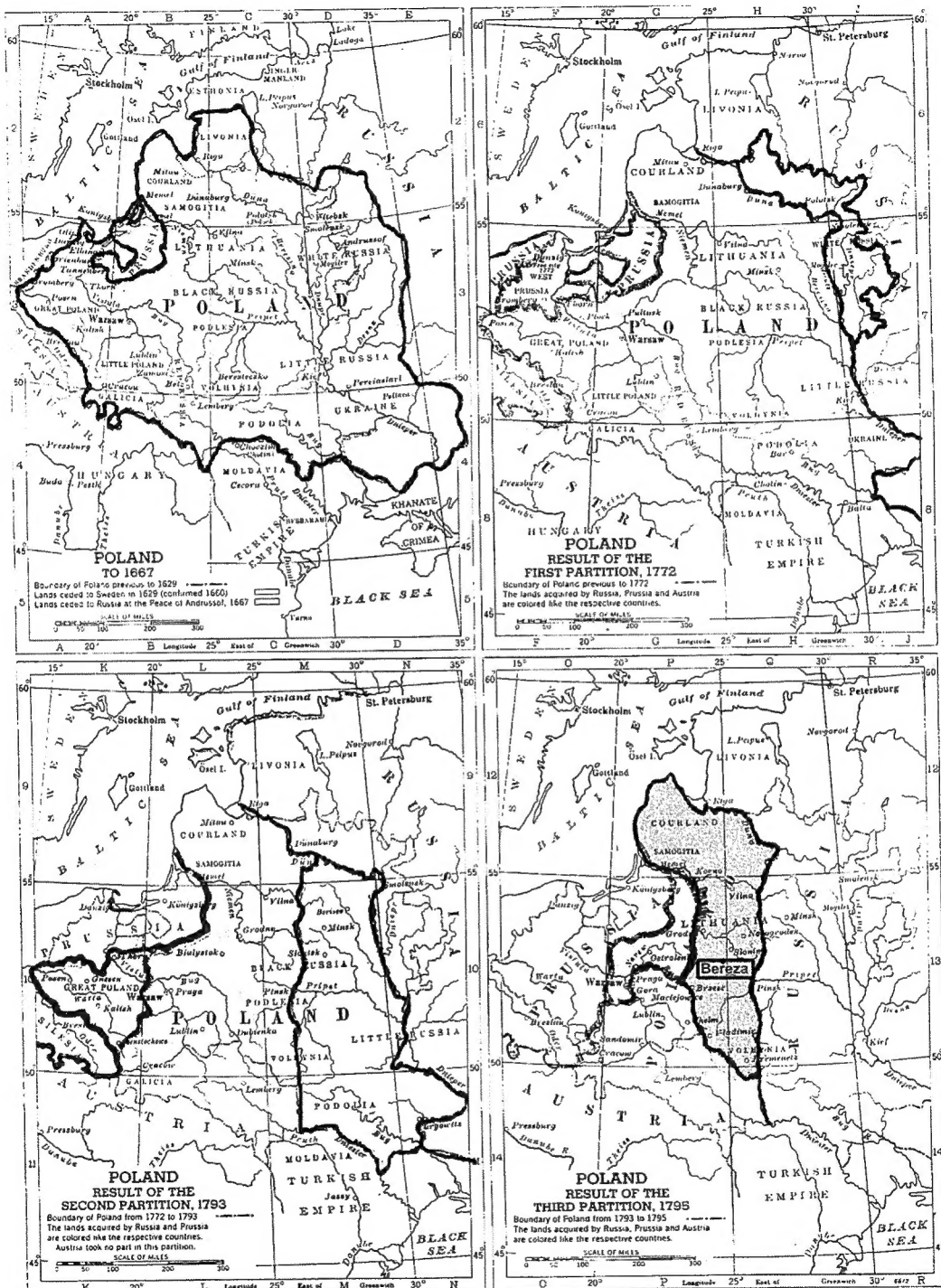
Every member of my family who remained in Europe was tortured and murdered by the Nazis. In 1942, the town of Bereza Kartuzka was divided into two ghettos. One was for the elderly and those incapable of working at a trade; the other was for those who knew a trade or were skilled workers.

The Nazis first took the ghetto population consisting of elderly and non-able working members to the railroad station at Bludnie, a small village three miles (five km) away. They were put into Pullman cars like cattle and brought to Bronna Gora (a town midway between Bereza Kartuzka and Kosova) about twelve and a half miles (twenty km) away, a site where the Nazis murdered many Jews from neighboring towns. They were taken into the woods and shot. Some were buried alive.

My family went to the ghetto for able workers where they applied their skills for the Nazi S.S. Here they learned what happened to the occupants of the other ghetto. Trying to plan an escape, they dug a tunnel under the River Yasholda. An anti-Semitic Pole saw what was going on and told the S.S. The Germans came with tanks on October 15, 1942, surrounded the ghetto and opened fire on our people. Some had ammunition, automatic rifles and hand grenades. They fought for one day. The Germans called in more soldiers from the neighboring town of Pruzana, and finally crushed the whole ghetto by nightfall. Those who did not want to fall into the hands of the Germans committed suicide by setting their homes on fire. Some people were unable to put themselves to death this way. The Germans rounded them up from the ghetto, forced them into two trucks and transported them into the woods, five miles (eight km) from the village, and murdered them. Not one person was left alive...adults, children, not even infants.

Our thoughts, our movements, our bodies, must agree with the force of the universe in order to have true peace and health. The purpose of our life is not to become famous, to make a lot of money, or to get material possessions. When we work for those goals we lose sight of the true meaning of our lives. The purpose of life is to share love and happiness with people.





**Map #1: Poland and Partitions.** From 1000 A.D. to the 1600's Berezina and much of Eastern Europe was part of the Kingdom of Poland. From 1667 to 1795, Russia, Sweden, Prussia and Austria annexed large portions of land from Poland. Berezina was part of the land (shaded area) taken by Russia in 1795.

# **Chapter One:**

## **Historical Background**

Bereza Kartuzka, or “Bereza”, as we called it, was part of Tsarist Russia from 1795 until 1920 (see Map #1). Before 1795, it was part of the Kingdom of Poland. In 1920, at the end of the First World War, Russia, which had been defeated, was forced to give the western portion of Belarussia (White Russia) to the newly reestablished country of Poland. Bereza was located in western Belarussia, in the Province of Brest (also called Brest Litovsk) and became part of Poland. In 1939, at the beginning of World War II, Poland was conquered and divided between Germany and the Soviet Union (Russia). During World War II, Bereza was occupied by the Russian Army, then the German Army, and then again by the Russian Army. From the end of World War II, in 1945, until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1993, Bereza was part of Communist Russia. Today Bereza is in the independent country of Belarus (formerly the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarussia). On most current maps of Belarus, which are written in the Belarus language, Bereza is spelled Berjosa.

There were many different ethnic groups which lived in our area. Each nationality spoke its own language, but since all the languages were Slavic, the various nationalities were able to understand each other, no matter which ethnic group controlled the government. The languages were Belarus (White Russian), Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian. In addition to having some familiarity with these languages, Jews spoke Yiddish and Hebrew.

Life under the Tsars was filled with hardships for the Jews. There were many restrictions on where they could live, which occupations they could hold, and what they could do in their daily lives. Jews were required to live only in the Pale of Settlement. (A pale is an area to which a person or a group is restricted.) This bounded area is shown in Map #2. Periodically, the local government and clergy would instigate and organize pogroms, riots in which Jews were beaten and killed, and their shops and homes were looted. Because conditions were so difficult in Russia, from about 1880 to 1910, millions of Jews emigrated to North and South America.

The land around Bereza is very flat and swampy. There are no natural boundaries to protect it from advancing armies. Because Bereza is on the main road which connects Berlin, Warsaw, and Moscow, and because of the flat terrain, many of the warring countries involved in the First and Second World Wars marched through Bereza and often occupied it. Indeed, from 1914 to 1945, the people of Bereza were continually concerned with the threat or ravages of war.

In 1897, Bereza had a population of about six thousand; 60% of them were Jewish. Most of the non-Jewish population of Bereza was White Russian and the rest was Polish. After 1945, there were no Jews remaining in Bereza. In fact, the annihilation of the Jews was so complete that today there are very few signs that Jews ever lived in Bereza. After the Holocaust, the only two buildings that remained undamaged were the Yiddish and Hebrew schools. The buildings were standing but abandoned.



**Map #2:** Under the tyranny of the Russian Tsars, Jews were forced to live in the Pale of Settlement. (shaded area) Here they were subjected to extreme poverty and persecution. They were not allowed to own land, excluded from most trades and harassed by local officials. Periodically, they were subjected to physical violence in the form of “pogroms” or semi-organized riots, in which the local officials and clergy encouraged the peasants to destroy Jewish homes and shops, and brutalize the Jews living there.

## Chapter Two: Uncle Hymie's Contribution to the Story

The information in this section was contributed by Hyman Dolgin. Hyman (Hymie or Herman) was my uncle (my mother's youngest brother).

My father (Harry's maternal grandfather), Abraham Isaac Dolgin was probably born in the late 1830's or early 1840's. When he was twenty-two years old he married a young girl. They had no children and religious Jews are expected to have a family. According to Jewish tradition if a married couple doesn't have any children after ten years, it is permissible for the husband to divorce his wife. At age thirty-two

Abraham divorced his wife. When this young woman departed, she "left him with straw." She took everything and left only a pillow, a "perrina" (quilt) and the straw that made the bed, nothing else. That same year, Abraham married Feige Hannah Warhofic who was twenty years old. At that time, twenty was old for a woman to be still unmarried.

In English "Feige" means "little bird." Warhofic is a German name which may come from the words "Var heit" which mean truthful or trustworthy. In the 1800's the Germans took over the area on the Polish-Russian border. At that time Jews had no last names and used the phrase "son of \_\_\_\_\_" as a last name. For example Harry would be called "Harry, son of Benjamin." The Germans made the Jews assume last names. That may be the explanation of Feige Hannah's maiden name.

Abraham Isaac Dolgin's parents were named Henach (Henry) and Esther. They were Harry's maternal great-grandparents and were probably born before 1820. Esther Dolgin, Abraham's mother, lived for a very long time, possibly to the age of ninety. Feige



**Photograph #1:** Avram Itzhak (Abraham Isaac) Dolgin, Hyman Dolgin's father and Harry Kabran's maternal grandfather, pictured with his prayerbook and skullcap. He was a very religious man and probably wanted that depicted in this photograph. He died in 1923; this picture was probably taken between 1910 and 1923.

Hannah Dolgin's father was named Gershon Warhoftic. Many people in our family were named in honor of Abraham, Esther, Henry, Gershon, and Feige. They either have the same first names or have names which begin with the same first letter as our forebearers. This information may explain the origin of the names of Harry's brothers, sisters and cousins. They are named for Harry's great-grandparents.

After they got married, Abraham and Feige Hannah lived in a small village. They had thirteen children but only seven of them survived. I was the youngest child and was born in 1900. The village was very small and had only two other Jewish families and no "cheder" (Hebrew school). So in 1909, when I was nine years old, our family moved to the town of Bereza.

In Bereza we lived in a large, wooden, two-story house. Everyone lived on the first floor in two big rooms, a kitchen and a dining room. In the kitchen there was a big brick stove. We used to bake "challah" (bread) inside that stove. In the front of the stove was a place to make tea. In the dining room there were two big beds and a couch. At night everyone slept in the dining room. I slept on the couch, which opened up to become a bed. When my brothers Henach (Henry) and Michel (Max) got married and went to live in America, their wives Chasha Henna and Mirka (Molly) moved in with us. It was crowded until they left to make the trip to the United States.

Downstairs, the basement served as a barn for a cow, a calf and about forty chickens. On the top floor was the attic. Here we kept hay for the cow and a lot of junk. It wasn't so good. It was a poor life.

We had a big garden that was about sixty by one hundred feet. In the garden we grew mostly potatoes, because in Poland everyone lived on potatoes. We also grew carrots, cucumbers, beets, and chard. We stored the potatoes and ate them almost every day all the way into January. We ate them baked and mashed. In Europe at that time we didn't have too much luxury.

In the front of the house we had an orchard of five apple trees. We picked the apples, put them in the attic and covered them with hay. They ripened there and we ate them during the winter months.

Abraham was a blacksmith and made horseshoes, axes and hoes. He also shod horses. He worked in the basement but in the winter it was so cold that he had to bring the horses into the house to shoe them. Afterward Feige had to clean the house. That horse manure made our garden one of the best in the town. As a sideline he operated a windmill. The peasants (Christian farmers) brought their wheat and corn to him and he ground it into flour.

The windmill was located in the garden, away from the house. It was about three stories high and had blades or wings which turned in the wind. We made the wings from very thin wood so that the windmill would turn easily. The wings were attached to a long vertical pole which turned. At the bottom of the pole there were two heavy stones. The peasants brought their grain to us. We put the grain into the space between the stones and the stones turned and ground the grain into flour. On the side we had a big box to collect the flour. Twice each day, when the wind changed direction, we had to turn the top of the windmill so that it would face into the wind. When there were storms we closed the mill. One time a big storm turned the mill over. We had to call a man to fix it and put it back up.

There were only two mills in Bereza, so many of the peasants brought their grain to our mill. We had more food than most other families because of the windmill. When we cleaned up the grinding box for the next farmer we were able to keep the flour that collected in the corners. Sometimes the peasants paid in cash, but because of inflation and because there were so many different governments, the money

wasn't worth anything. The peasants paid us in flour, potatoes, barley, or cucumbers. Many times Feige would send food to other neighbors who didn't have enough to eat. Our house is no longer there. It was torn down and replaced by a ball field.

My father, Abraham Isaac, was a very pious and honest man. When he would "dovin" (pray) in the morning, it took him two hours. When he was praying you could hear him on the next block. When the peasants came to bring him work, if they heard him praying they wouldn't disturb him. Instead of going into the house they sat outside and waited until he finished praying.

Bereza was on the main road which ran from Warsaw to Moscow. During the First World War a lot of fighting took place near our house. Many times we hid under the bed and prayed. The more we prayed the more bombs fell around us. At one point the Germans occupied Bereza, so we ran away. When we came back, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we didn't recognize the house. The German soldiers took out the windows. These soldiers must have been considerate people. We had a very nice glass door. They removed the door and stored it in a closet so it wouldn't get broken. In the garden they dug trenches and made a big hole for their cannon. In excavating the yard they dug up all the yellow sand and buried the fertile top soil. It took us two years of cultivation before we were able to grow anything in that garden. We were lucky that my father was a blacksmith or we would not have had anything to eat. The peasants didn't have any money so they paid us in potatoes.

On Thursdays my mother made bread for the whole week. She used about forty pounds of flour. The bread would puff up over night. Then she would knead it and bake it on Friday. It looked like a rye bread. Jewish people observed the Sabbath and didn't cook on Saturday. On Friday, my mother made a "chunt", a stew that contained potatoes, barley, carrots and whatever food was in the house. She put the ingredients in a big pot and placed it on the stove on Friday. It cooked over a low fire overnight and was eaten on Saturday at noon. Sometimes the barley wasn't completely cooked and we all had stomach aches.

My mother Feige Hannah was a warm person. She would sit on the floor and play and sing with the children. I want to tell a story to show how nice my mother was. There was a family whose house was burned down. They moved into some empty buildings near our home. They would come to our house and ask if they could put their "chunt" on our stove until Saturday. We put their pot on the stove and looked in. The pot was filled with water and only one barley grain chasing another one. So my mother would add more vegetables to their pot because we had more than they did. It went this way for a nice couple of months. One Friday my mother told me to go over to the neighbors to get their pot. The neighbor said, "No. Your mother is too nice. She keeps filling our pot with food. We can't do that anymore." My mother was a very kind woman.

Abraham and Feige were generous and just people. When we lived in the small village there were only three Jewish families. Three times a year Jewish peddlers would come through our village. Abraham and Feige would invite the peddlers to sleep over in our house. We gave them food and fed their horses. After one peddler left, my father sent me up to the attic to throw hay down for our cow. When I went upstairs I noticed that the spare rope was missing. It was a long, strong rope that was used to turn the windmill into the wind. Abraham and Feige were outraged. They hired a man who had a horse and wagon and went after the peddler. When they caught up with the peddler they didn't go to him, they went to the rabbi. The rabbi sent a "shammus", a helper from the synagogue, to get the peddler. The peddler came to the rabbi and Feige told the rabbi what happened. The peddler said that he sold the rope to someone else but he would give her the money. Feige insisted that she wanted the original rope back. The man who bought the rope said it was his and he wouldn't return it. She made the peddler go to a

store and buy her another rope, which cost the man more than he sold the original one for. When she returned to our village she was ashamed to tell people that a Jew was a thief. When they pressed her to find out what happened she said, "I killed him."

My mother was not a healthy person. She had trouble breathing. When I left for America she was sick in bed, crying. I cannot forget when I left Europe. It was Purim, before Passover. My parents made me go and say good-bye to the rabbi and ask for a blessing. After I saw the rabbi a man who owned a wagon drove me to the train. As we drove away my father was waving good-bye and walking behind the wagon. He didn't want to let me out of his sight because he knew it was the last time he would see me. He looked old. As far back as I can remember he was an old man with a white beard. As the wagon drove farther away I couldn't see him anymore and I felt like I lost him. I'll never forget that picture, my father walking after the wagon trying to see me for a few more seconds. My mother died in 1921 when I was in America, and my father died two years later, in 1923.

## Photograph #2

Sheine Gitel Dolgin Kabran is pictured with her brother Nachman Dolgin. Sheine is Herman Dolgin's older sister and Harry Kabran's mother. Nachman is Herman Dolgin's brother and Harry Kabran's uncle. They are standing next to Abraham Isaac Dolgin's tombstone. Abraham is the father of Sheine, Nachman and Herman and is Harry Kabran's grandfather. Nachman sent a letter to Herman saying that they needed money to put a tombstone over Abraham's grave. Several times the brothers living in the United States, Herman, Henry and Max, sent about twenty dollars to the family in Poland. Instead of using the money to put up a stone the family used the money to buy bread. Herman received a letter from a cousin who lived in Bereza. She said, "What's the matter? Why don't you send money so your father can have a gravestone?" The three brothers put together forty-five dollars and sent it to the family in Poland for a gravestone. This time the family sent this picture to the three brothers, to let them know that the gravestone was erected. This picture was probably taken between 1923 and 1926.



The translation of the inscription on the gravestone is:

Here is buried  
 An elderly, honest gentleman  
 Pure and pleasant in his deeds  
 The work of his hand is very honored  
 Abraham Isaac  
 Son of Rabee Henach (Henry), Member of the Levi tribe  
 May His Memory Be For A Blessing  
 Dolgi  
 Who died on the 13th of Tishrey in the Year  
 1923 May His Soul Be Bound In The Bonds Of The Living

On the gravestone the name is spelled "Dolgi" with a "hard g" sound and no "n" at the end. In Russian Dolgi means "long" or "lengthy." It is not known why the name is spelled this way. In 1923 the thirteenth of Tishrey fell on Sunday, September 28<sup>th</sup>.



# Chapter Three:

## My Family and My Town

### BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

My grandfather Avram Itzhak (Abraham Isaac) Dolgin and grandmother, Feige Hannah Dolgin, on my mother's side, lived in Bereza Kartuzka, a small village in what was then part of Tsarist Russia. Uncle Nachman (Nathan) Dolgin and his family also lived in the town, and my Aunt Sara Leah lived in a nearby village, about twenty-nine miles (forty-seven km) away.

My father's brother's children and their families lived nearby. My cousin Avram Jeshua (Abraham Joshua), his wife, their son Ya' acov (Jacob) and their daughter Jocheved lived in our town. Avram Jeshua's sister, Frume and her two sons also lived in Bereza. My second cousin, Rochel (Rochelle) Eisenberg lived in Pinsk. Ya' acov, Rochel and Rochel's younger sister survived the war and moved to Israel.

My grandparents lived on the main road near the second of two bridges that crossed the River Yasholda. They had seven children: two daughters; Sheine Gitel (my mother) and Sara Leah, and five sons; Henach (Henry), Michel (Max), Shmerl, Nachman (Nathan) and Hyman (Herman), the youngest.

Between 1902 and 1904, my Uncle Henach and Uncle Michel (Max) emigrated to the United States. Uncle Michel had been called to serve in the Tsar's Army. In those days an enlistment in the Russian Army could be for as long as 25 years. So Uncle Michel left Bereza, secretly hidden in the bottom of a wagon filled with potatoes. He ended up in New York City.

In 1914, at the beginning of the First World War, Uncle Shmerl and my father were mobilized into the Russian Army, so my grandfather then had three children remaining at home; Nachman, Sara Leah and Hyman. In 1921, when Uncle Hyman was called to the Polish Army, he also snuck out of Bereza and went to live in America. Uncle Shmerl never returned home to Bereza Kartuzka. After the First World War ended, he married a Russian girl in Constantinovka and remained there with his wife and two children. He used to correspond with us until World War II broke out.

My mother's name was Sheine Gitel, which means "beautiful Gertrude" in English. In 1905, my mother, who was born in 1882, married my father Benjamin, who was born in 1879. They moved across the street from her parents in a small house with a straw-covered roof and a clay floor. As time went by, my mother had four children, two sons and two daughters: Abraham Joshua, born in 1906, my sister Esther, born in 1909, my brother Gershon, born in 1911, and my sister Adel, who was born in 1913. When the First World War broke out and my father was mobilized to the Russian Army, my mother, who was six months pregnant, was left to take care of four small children. I was born three months after my father left to join the Russian Army, three months after Purim, on March 3, 1915, the youngest of five children. My mother named me Harry.

There is a reason for the double name of the village. The first name, Bereza, means birch trees in Russian, and many birch trees grew around the town. The second name, Kartuzka, comes from a monastery that stood near the south side of the village. The monastery was constructed at the end of the 17th century by a Litwanian prince. Cartesian priests (followers of the French philosopher René Descartes)

lived at the monastery; that's why the name, Bereza-Kartuzka. Later on the monastery was destroyed by the Russian Army. When I was a boy, the park was still there and some buildings remained enclosed in the fortifications. On Saturdays and holidays villagers used to walk to that abandoned park.

The town is located on the main road (called "The Street") which connects Moscow on the east and Warsaw on the west. The city of Brest is sixty-two miles (100 km) to the west, and Baranovich, another city, is seventy-five miles (120 km) to the east of the village. Bereza is one hundred and eighty-five miles (300 km) from Warsaw, the capital of Poland. There were other towns close by, such as Pruzana, Shershev, Malch, Zelice, Rozany, Slonim, Telechan, Pinsk, Bronna Gora and Kosova.

The whole province of Brest Litovsk is very swampy. During the rainy season, which lasts approximately from September to January, the area is extremely muddy. It was named Polesye, and known throughout the world as one of the largest swamps in Europe. Because of the swamps, the land was very poor. It was hard for the farmers and the townspeople to make a living.

I have some early memories of life in the town of Bereza Kartuzka, memories of my family and of events that took place in the village and the surrounding countryside.

I remember a story my mother told me which took place in 1917, when I was about two years old. We lived across the street from Grandfather Dolgin, in a small house with a thatched roof. At that time, the city repaired and fixed the road, which was made partly of stones and partly of wooden logs. They used a heavy iron steam roller to smooth the stones. When the road workers passed over this pavement with their pressing machine, it threw out sparks. It was windy that day and some sparks fell on our straw roof and it caught on fire. The whole house went up in flames. Everyone in the house ran out, but I got scared and hid in the bedroom behind a big trunk where linen was kept. Father was away in the army, mother was out working, but Uncle Hyman, aged seventeen, was at home and frantically searched for me. Luckily he found me hiding behind the trunk and pulled me out just in time before the flames reached us, saving my life. Thanks to Uncle Hyman I'm still around.

Grandfather Dolgin had a blacksmith shop. He worked with iron and made all kinds of implements; plows, tillers (used for turning over the soil), horseshoes, and wheel rims. When I was seven or eight years old, I would go over to my grandfather's shop and ask him if I could help. He would let me pump the billows to make the fire hot. I got a kick out of that. He had an orchard on the side of the house. I used to pick apples, pears and cherries and eat them right there. If I had any left over I would bring them home. They kept a big barrel for fruit in a storage room in the house. The house did not have a wooden floor, and the cold from the ground kept the fruit cool. When my grandfather died, my Uncle Nachman took over my grandfather's shop with the help of his wife, Freida. Sometimes I would go over and help with the billows, and sometimes I worked with Uncle Nachman to pound the hot metal to form horseshoes.

The town of Bereza was near a lot of water, with the River Yasholda circling around it. On the north side of town, two bridges crossed the river. The first bridge spanned the river where the water was shallow, and the second bridge crossed the Yasholda where the water was deeper. In the summer months, the townspeople used to bathe and swim in the river by the second bridge, in the deep water. After a day's work, our whole family used to walk to the river, wash up and take a good swim. There were many drowning accidents where the water was deep. One of my cousins tried to rescue his friend and they both drowned. When they were pulled out by the firemen, they were entwined together in an embrace.

Bereza also had many forests, with good wood. The logs were cut in the summer and piled up until winter, to be pulled out of the forest with horses and sleds. The swampy conditions prevented the logs from being moved in the summer. In the winter, the swamps froze and were covered with hard ice. The horse and sled, even with a heavy load of logs, wouldn't break through the ice. The logs were very long, about 40 feet, so two sleds were used; two men were in the front sled with the horse and one man in the back sled with a steering brake, otherwise the back would slide over into the ditch. The horses had special shoes that gripped the ice and enabled them to walk on it.

The logs were hauled to the River Yasholda; in the summer they were tied together to make rafts and floated down the river. The Yasholda runs into the Profetto, then the Bug and finally into the River Vistula, which flows to Germany and reaches the Baltic Sea in the north. A delta forms near Danzig which is now part of Poland and called Gdansk.

From time to time, especially in the spring when the ice and snow melted, the river spilled out of its banks. The people were flooded, and had to move away from the river. They moved in with friendly neighbors who would give them temporary shelter. When the river receded, the people returned to their homes, where much of their belongings were damaged. The rainy season started in September and lasted until January, with mud and water all over the town. Everyone had to wear boots in order to walk outside. Some areas were impossible to pass through. The market place was often muddy or filled with water. There were no paved streets in the town; only the main road was laid out with stones and wooden logs. There were no cars in the town at this time; horse and wagon was the main form of transportation. Very often the people would have to gather around and help a driver pull his wagon out of the muddy streets.

About twelve miles (20 km) away from our town, quite a few Jews lived in the villages of Sporova Olisheva and Nivke, situated among the Sporova Lakes. These lakes were rich in fish, and the people there made a good living. They had a good business transporting the fish that were caught in the lakes to Warsaw, Brest, Kobrin and Pruzana by horse and wagon. The wagon was fitted with a wooden box, and the fish were packed in the box and covered with straw and ice. The fish stayed fresh for a few days in this way until they came to their destination. I remember up until 1930, when we lived on the main road, those fish people with their horses and wagons used to pass by our town at night. They would knock on our door and ask if they could sleep over. My mother would put straw down on the floor and they would have a night's rest.

Life in our town during the First World War was very hard, especially for my family. When the Russians mobilized my father into the army in 1914, my mother was left alone with five small children to feed. The family moved off the main road to the south side of the first bridge near the River Yasholda. My mother rented a small dilapidated house and struggled very hard to make a living and raise the children. She used to buy odds and ends of fabric, take them to the neighboring villages and exchange them for grain and potatoes. She would return home, walking long distances and carrying the food on her back. Sometimes my Uncle Hyman, her brother, would help carry the load. He was a teenager at that time, approximately fifteen years old. My mother had to get a permit from the existing government, otherwise she would be arrested for this activity. It was a very hard struggle to make a living.

Almost everyone grew vegetables in their back yard to help survive, and we did too. There were also a few fruit trees. We also raised chickens that roamed around free in the garden during the day. At night they jumped in the branches of the fruit trees for protection from the animals and slept there until morning. Until 1932 we had a cow that gave us enough milk for the whole family. My mother made her own butter, cream cheese, farmer's cheese and sour milk. In the summer the shepherd would take our

cow out to the pasture with the neighbors' cows and bring them back in the evening before it got dark. We had no refrigerators at that time, so we had a shack in the back of the house that was connected to the main house. I built it myself. I dug a space in the ground about three feet deep and about three feet by four feet wide. I boxed it in with wooden boards and put a cover on the top. This is what we used for a refrigerator. In the summer it kept the food from getting spoiled, and in the winter it kept the food from freezing. Almost everyone in town lived in this way, with their own garden, cow and chickens. Some had their own horse and wagon and made a living by transporting goods.

Most of the Jews in town were tradesmen. Some were storekeepers who met the needs of the town and the surrounding farm villages. In order to make a living they had to work from dawn to dark. In the winter when the days were short, they used kerosene lamps to light the shops. It was a hard way to make a living and many people lived in poverty. The farmers in the surrounding villages were also poor, because the land was so poor and swampy. Some farmers couldn't even afford kerosene to light their homes. They split pieces of wood and lit them close to the chimney so the smoke went out of the house, up the chimney. That was their source of light.

The children in town ran around barefoot until they were five or six years old and started to go to school. Most of the farmers worked all their lives barefooted, or they wore "posteles", shoes they made themselves from the bark of birch trees. They would wrap their feet with cotton material and cover it with birch bark, making the "posteles". This would keep their feet warm in the winter and cool in the summer. The children of the farmers didn't go to school at all. When the farmers came to town to sell a pig or a calf that they raised, most of them would spend their profits on vodka. Then you had to watch out for them; they used to get very rough and dangerous. Sometimes they would lose all the money they collected from the sale this way.

The Jewish population in Bereza enjoyed a high level of cultural activities. There was a religious "chedar" (school) for beginners and a "Talmud Tora" for advanced religious study. There was a Yiddish School and a Hebrew School, "Tarbut Javne" with advanced teaching. There was also a free Polish public school that was open to everyone, but the Jewish parents didn't want to send their children to a non-Jewish school. Of the entire Jewish population of the town, I can recall only one girl who attended the Polish public school. Her father was a deaf mute shoemaker. The family was very poor and there were no scholarships available then. Their son went to the Yiddish School.

We had a theater, and there was a group that belonged to the dramatic circle which quite often presented very good programs. There were also touring groups that came to town to stage performances and show movies. There was a "Bund" organization for socialism, the leftist Mizrochi religious group and the Zionist organizations, the Chalutz and Hashomer Hatzair. These were working organizations that trained their members and educated them to work hard for Israel. I was a member of Hashomer Hatzair. They even had kibbutzim in Bereza and Bludnie, which had members who worked in the saw mills. It was hard work. There was also a "Beitar", a right wing group that followed Zabotinski. The town also had a sports club and a few soccer teams that had matches with neighboring towns. We had two nice libraries, one Yiddish and one Hebrew; you could get all kinds of books. There was a volunteer fire brigade and the town had its own orchestra. I belonged to the orchestra and played a bass horn, which is like a tuba. The orchestra marched in parades on Polish holidays.

It was a nice, lovely town with good people, mostly poor but happy. From time to time there were clashes between the Jewish school children and the Christians. The Christian boys used to throw stones at the Jewish children, but they were always chased away. Sometimes the adult Polish people would provoke clashes, but they were also chased away.

Because the town was on the main road connecting Moscow, Warsaw and Berlin, all the troops passed through our village during the First World War; Russian, German, Austrian, Hungarian and Polish. Each group of soldiers was worse than the one before. Because the soldiers were hungry, mean and barbaric, they would enter the Jewish homes and rob them of everything they could get their hands on. The Bolsheviks were barefoot, so they would even take shoes and clothing, as well as food and money. There was no way to put up a resistance. The worst of them were the Polish troops. They were murderous. They would beat up the Jews and take all their belongings. I saw all the armies that fought each other pass through our town. Sometimes they would leave their casualties in the village.



**Photograph #3:** (left to right) Harry Kabran, my brother Gershon Kabran, and my sister Esther Kabran. This picture was taken in Bereza in 1929 to celebrate moving into the new house which we built in the center of Bereza. I was fourteen years old, Gershon was eighteen and Esther was twenty.

I remember in 1920, when I was five years old and the First World War was coming to an end, the Poles came through our village. They attacked and robbed the Jewish section of town without mercy. Once, some Polish troops saw my brother Abraham Joshua, who was fourteen years old, with something in his pocket. They thought it was money, so they attacked him and beat him up. When they searched his pocket they found only the "tiflin" that the Jews use for praying. When they found nothing of value, that made them even more angry, and they beat him more. My mother interfered and begged them to stop. He survived, badly beaten but alive.

As the years passed, things in the village changed. Russia started to build a railroad that connected Moscow and Warsaw, a line that had to pass through Bereza. The residents didn't like the idea that the train would pass through the town because of the noise and disturbance it would cause. They protested, so it was built outside the center of town, about three miles (five km) away in Bludnie. After that, most of the transportation went via the railroad, and reduced the amount of horse and wagon traffic. But the railroad opened up more jobs, and people who worked on the rail line needed supplies, so the town was busy manufacturing these goods. Saw mills opened up in the town, and also in Bludnie. The wood was exported out of the area, mainly to Germany. A lot of businesses were created for contractors to transport the wood for export, and many Jewish people had these jobs. There were also brick, tar and lime factories. Some farmers had their own windmills in the surrounding villages, but now two steam-driven flour mills opened up. The Russians also built a camp for an Army regiment on the south side of town; this also helped the town prosper. Little by little, the town started to look better. Until this time, most of the houses had straw-covered roofs. Now the straw was replaced with shingles or metal, and people painted their homes. A few brick houses were erected, and wooden floors were built in them, replacing clay floors.



**Photograph #4:** My oldest brother Abraham Joshua Kabran, age twenty-five, taken in Bereza in 1931.

My father was a soldier for eight years in the Russian Army, four years in training for the Tsar in Russia, and four years of mobilization, from 1914 until the end of the First World War. He came home after the war was over in 1920. By then our town, and the whole province of Brest Litovsk, was already under Polish rule because the Poles had won their independence from Russia as a result of World War I. On May 3, 1920 there was a great celebration to commemorate Polish independence.

Following his discharge from the army, my father opened a shoe shop and employed some workers. It was hard for my father to make a living because he had to pay for all his children to attend private school. He had the biggest and best shoe manufacturing shop in town and throughout the neighboring villages. He used the best materials and the best workmanship, employing good tradesmen. People knew about his shop and flooded him with orders. He worked hard, and my brothers worked for him, but he could never save any money. We were very poor. My father was a very honest man, too honest. He thought that every storekeeper he dealt with was honest also. He used to buy his materials and leather from the storekeepers on credit. They took his money but never put it on his account. My

father's mother died when he was born and his father died when he was twelve. He only went to "cheder", the beginner's school, and only learned to read Hebrew for the Jewish prayers in the synagogue. He didn't know mathematics, and the storekeepers knew that. He trusted them and they cheated him. Whatever they said was all right, and he never could get out of debt. The storekeepers lived a good life at our expense, and my family struggled just to make a living.

When my brother Gershon grew up and started to help my father, he saw that something was wrong. So many people came into the store, and so many were working in the shop, but no money was coming in. My brother started to watch the way my father handled the bills with the storekeepers. Every Monday and Thursday they would come for the money. My father would keep some money for his expenses and give his creditors the rest of the money he had collected for the week. For the next few weeks, my brother marked down for himself how much my father gave to the storekeepers. One Thursday, when the storekeeper came to collect the money, my brother stopped my father from paying. He asked the storekeeper for his books, to see the account, and asked how much my father owed him. The storekeeper started to yell at my brother that it wasn't his business and that he only dealt with my father. He took a revolver out of his pocket and aimed it at my brother. My brother hit him over the head with an iron tool he had in his hand, knocked the revolver to the ground, and kicked the collector out of the shop. Gershon told him not to come back without the account book.

The next time he came in, he had the account. My brother looked at the entries from the last few weeks, knowing from his own records what should be there, but there was nothing. From that time on, my brother kept his own accounts and my father started to accumulate some money. Thanks to my brother's work we accumulated some cash, and Gershon was able to stop buying from the cheating storekeepers. He traveled sixty-two miles (100 km) by bus to a wholesale store in Brest Litovsk and was able to buy supplies for my father's shop for far less money. My father was able to set aside a few thousand dollars, buy a lot on the market square and build a house. In 1930 we moved into our own brick house, thanks to my brother's wisdom. Our life improved for the better, and we were able to harvest what we were sowing. My sister Esther got married and opened a dress shop in our house. She made dresses to order. Adel my other sister helped her. Uncle Nachman also built a new little house on the premises where our grandfather lived. He lived there with his wife Freida and three children.

The Polish government called Uncle Hyman to the army in 1921. He was smart, he snuck out of Poland and found his way to the United States, joining his brothers Michel (Max) and Henach (Henry). I remember when he left, I was six years old. Later he married Aunt Ida and had a daughter, Bernice. Meanwhile, the Polish government was looking for him. They came to the village a few times, thinking he was in hiding, but he was in the United States already.

A few years later Grandma Feige Hannah (1921) and then Grandpa Abraham Itzhak (1923) died. After that Uncle Nachman got married and had three nice children; a son, Judel and two daughters, Esther and Feige Hannah. My aunt, Sara Leah, married a man from the town of Rozany, about 30 miles (47 km) from Bereza. They lived on a farm and had two boys, Gershon and Shimshol. It was hard for them to make a living in Rozany.

In 1929 I graduated from the Hebrew School. I wanted to continue studying engineering in the technical school, but the family couldn't afford it. All the money was tied up finishing the house we started to build. I contributed a lot of my time and work to constructing the house. In 1930, after we finished and moved in, I went to work as a carpenter's apprentice, learning to build houses. But there wasn't much work in town, so I started to learn the trade of "over tailor".

An over tailor makes the upper part of shoes and boots. In 1939, after starting this trade, I was able to open my own shop. I rented a building, bought two machines and hired a man to help me. I continued the struggle to make a living.



## Chapter Four:

# The Polish Army

MARCH 1937 - SEPTEMBER 1939

On January 30, 1933, at the age of 43, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany. From then on, the life of the Jews in Germany was filled with hardship. Hitler started to send Jewish merchants to the Dachau Concentration Camp near Munich. Jews were attacked and beaten in the streets. Pogroms (riots which were organized by the church and government, and directed against Jews) broke out all over Germany. Many Jews fled to the neighboring countries. Others fled to Palestine. Hitler sent agitators to neighboring states to foment against the Jews. Anti-Semitism spread rapidly all over Europe, especially in Poland.

Most of the 3.3 million Jews in Poland lived in poverty and misery. About a third of the Jews were unemployed or working part time and every second person was undernourished. The Jews in Poland had no recourse. The gates of the world were closed to emigration. The British closed Palestine and America had enacted a strict quota system for immigrants.

Since Poland's independence in 1918, the country was in an economic crisis which created the bitter environment of unemployment and drastically increased the level of anti-Semitism. Boycotts against the Jewish merchants and pogroms against Jews increased.

During the reign of Marshal Josef Pilsudski (1926-1935) the Polish government was mildly anti-Semitic but after his death in 1935, things got worse. His successor, Marshal Edward Shmigly Ritz, increased anti-Semitic policies. Jewish students were separated from others at Polish universities and were harassed and attacked by fellow Polish students. There was open governmental approval of boycotts against Jewish businesses. Between 1935 and 1937, 117 Jews were killed and 1350 were wounded in pogroms. The Poles organized pogroms in several cities like Prsytik, Chenstochova and Brest Litovsk in 1937. On November 8, 1938 the Nazis increased their agitation against the Jews in Germany and Austria. That day the Nazi newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, published an anti-Semitic editorial about Herschel Greenspan's shooting of Ernest Von Rath in Germany's Paris embassy in revenge for his family's expulsion from Poland by the Nazis.

November 10, 1938 was an unimaginable night known as KRISTALLNACHT (the night of broken glass). All over Germany and Austria, Jews were wounded, killed, and had their homes destroyed. Businesses and synagogues were broken into and burned. Ninety-one Jews were killed, hundreds were wounded and many exiled. Seventy-five hundred Jewish homes and shops and hundreds of synagogues were burned. About 30,000 German Jews were deported to three concentration camps, including Dachau, where they were joined by 4600 Austrian Jews.

In 1933 my brother Gershon, who had been in training in the Polish Army Cavalry for two years, returned home. The Polish government called my eldest brother Abraham Joshua to the Army and when he came back home in March of 1937, I was called. I was sent to the Artillery in Torun, Poland (see Map #3) which was close to the German border and a very anti-Semitic city, much worse than Bereza Kartuzka. The experience was so painful, I could hardly take it. I remember going into town for a walk or to shop and seeing townspeople picketing with signs and physically preventing passersby from frequenting the Jewish shops.



## EUROPE 1930-1939



**Map #3: Annexation of Czechoslovakia:** Between 1919 and 1939 Berezna was part of the Polish Republic. In March 1937 I was drafted into the Polish Army and sent to Torun for training. In 1938 my unit was mobilized to the southern border of Poland, opposite the Teschen (Cieszyn) area in Czechoslovakia. There the German and Polish Armies threatened Czechoslovakia and annexed territory when Czechoslovakia surrendered.

The officers in the Army were very anti-Semitic and so were the Polish soldiers. After the first three months of training, I was selected to attend officer training school to become an instructor for preparing soldiers. In 1937, a law was passed excluding Jews from officer training in the Polish Army. There were eight Jews in the school and they dismissed us, not wanting us to be in command in the Polish Army.

The Polish officers at that time instigated against the Jews. They called them dirty names and tried to beat them up. The soldiers followed suit and did the same. I stood up in opposition whenever I saw any act of discrimination against us. I gained respect from the Polish soldiers for my strong opposition- they only attacked weaklings. I remember many instances of rescuing fellow Jewish soldiers from abuse.

My sergeant once watched while I was protecting myself from attack from anti-Semites. He called me a dirty Jew and tried to hit me with a stick. I grabbed a horse seat belt and he immediately stopped, but he reported me to the Captain. The Captain, who was also an anti-Semite, punished me. I was forced to sleep in an isolated room for five days. That didn't bother me, and it did not curtail my strong opposition whenever I was a witness to further acts of anti-Semitism in the army.

From time to time our company sent out soldiers on 24-hour duty to protect the military warehouses and ammunition stores. One officer was appointed as head of the guards, and was assigned to change the guards every two hours, day and night. The sentries were given a secret code, and without that code, no one was allowed to come near the guards, even the head of the regiment. There was a regiment inspector officer who came to check if the guards were asleep on duty, and even he had to give the guards the secret code. Sometimes he would catch the guards asleep. He would take the guard's rifle away and send him to jail for six months. Once while I was on duty at two in the morning, there was no light and it was very dark all around. I heard steps, and looked around, with my rifle ready. I saw a man coming closer and closer to me. I called out loudly to him to stop and asked him to give me the secret code. He did not answer, and kept coming nearer. I had the right to shoot him, and so I did, to protect myself and to uphold my duty. I shot him in the leg and he fell down. I shot another bullet overhead in the sky to give an alarm. The head of the guards and a few soldiers came over. They gave me the secret code so I let them approach and told them what happened. We checked on the man that I shot and it was the regiment inspector officer, a major. He looked like he was drunk. They took him by ambulance to the hospital. I had to report to higher military authorities and give an explanation for what happened. They gave me credit for my actions. Since he didn't give me the secret code, I had to act as I did. He was known to catch the guards and send them to jail. If I had let him approach without giving me the secret code, I would have gotten six months in jail. Better him than me.

For 18 months I remained in the anti-Semitic Polish Army for training. Finally, September 30, 1938, the day for my release came. Everyone went to the Magazine to get back the civilian clothing that they arrived with before our inscription. I went there happily, got my things and went back to change my clothing. Before I started to undress and throw off the uniform, I heard an alarm for a mobilization. We had to return our civilian clothing, take back the rifles with only five bullets each and the 75 mm cannon, and out we went the same day to the Czechoslovakian border, to a region called Za Olze (the name of a river), near Cieszyn (also called Teschen - see Map #3).

Hitler started his trickery and barbarous warfare in Europe by fooling the Polish officials into believing they would get a part of Czechoslovakia if they joined forces with Germany. They were told they would gain more territory by Za Olze and the city of Cieszyn. Poland bought the trick. We had to go to the Czechoslovakian border. We took our position around Cieszyn, Za Olze, dug trenches and were ready to attack. Af-



**Photograph #5:** My brother Gershon Kabran, age twenty-two, in Polish Cavalry uniform. This picture was taken in Bereza in 1934.



**Photograph #6:** Harry Kabran, age twenty-two, in Polish Army uniform, taken in Bereza, 1937.

ter about a month the Germans and Poles gave Czechoslovakia an ultimatum to surrender, otherwise they would be attacked.



In 1938 the Czechs had a population of 14,000,000, of whom 3,000,000 were German speaking. These Germans lived principally in the area known as the Sudetenland. The leader of the German-speaking populous in the Sudetenland, Konrad Henlew, agitated for the union of the area with Germany. He had strong support from Nazi Germany which planned to attack Czechoslovakia. But the Czechs had a well trained army, even better than the Germans. They were well equipped and perhaps the only country in Europe militarily prepared for war. Hitler knew that. He didn't want to risk it alone. He convinced the Polish government to join Germany against the Czechs. He promised to give Poland the Cieszyn (Teschen) area which Poland had already claimed as its own. The Czechs gave in as they didn't want to start a war with two countries, and because the French and British weren't ready to help them.

During the Sudeten crisis in 1938, many synagogues were burned down and the Jews were increasingly harassed by local German-speaking Czechs. On September 23, 1938, the Germans encircled the Sudetenland region. Almost all of the 20,000 Sudetenland Jews fled into the still-independent Czechoslovakian provinces of Bohemia and Moravia. Those who remained were arrested by the Nazis and sent to concentration camps.



I remember the tense day we waited for an order to open fire along the border. Finally, at midnight, an announcement came that the Czechs had given in and we could march peacefully into the Czechoslovakian territory. The Polish Army marched alongside the Germans and took over the claimed territory. Czechoslovakia had a well organized military force, with good technology, good tanks, fortifications, artillery and airplanes, but they didn't have a chance against the two powers - Germany and Poland.

The Polish Army held a victory parade in Cieszyn (Teschen) for Hitler. I was supposed to participate in this "celebration," but I called in sick that day and was glad I didn't have to see his murderous face and his S.S. clique. Shortly afterward we went back to our quarters in Torun, which is in the Pomern section of Poland, and demobilized in December of 1938. Finally, I was able to return home to continue the struggle for life and existence.

My parents, brothers and sisters were waiting for me, and joyously welcomed me home. Meanwhile, anti-Semitism started to grow stronger and stronger all over Poland. It was coming from Germany. The government prohibited kosher butchers from working. Tradesmen, such as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, bricklayers, or hat makers were not allowed to open a shop without a diploma. Those trades were, of course, all the ones in which the Jews made a living. They also made it virtually impossible for the Jews to get a diploma. Every tradesman had to pass an examination, and many Jewish applicants were dismissed, even though they were good at their trades. At that time most of the trades were in Jewish hands and the Polish government was trying to change that.



In 1934 when the government in Poland passed from Marshal Pilsudsky's supporters' hands into the hands of a semi-Fascist organization, the rulers tried to follow the Nazi system. Kostek Bernatski, the head of the new Polish government of the State of Brest, built a concentration camp in Bereza. They used the buildings where the prior government had housed a military academy for officers and a school for the navy and tank units. They constructed a barbed wire fence ten feet high around the buildings. They built cells, partly filled with water and fitted with various kinds of torture equipment. Two hundred policemen acted as guards. There was a workshop too, where the prisoners made cement plates for paving the streets. The prisoners slept on two by four boards, nailed together about 3/4 of an inch apart. The food was terrible.

At first the concentration camp was used for anti-government elements and those suspected of being Communists. Later, criminal prisoners were sent to the camp, but under better conditions than the political prisoners had. In 1939, prior to World War II, many Jews were brought to the camp. They were arrested in their homes at 2 o'clock at night, imprisoned without a court order, and assigned to hard labor in the concentration camp. They were accused of hiking up the prices of merchandise. The prisoners, about 7,000 in all (men and women) were mistreated and tortured. On Sundays the prisoners were forced to sweep the main road where the police marched about a mile (two km) from their headquarters to the church. It was prohibited for the village residents to be in the street and nobody was allowed to watch them through the windows. I remember sneaking peeks to see the tortured people. They had to keep their faces down and rush with the brooms. It was heartbreaking to watch.

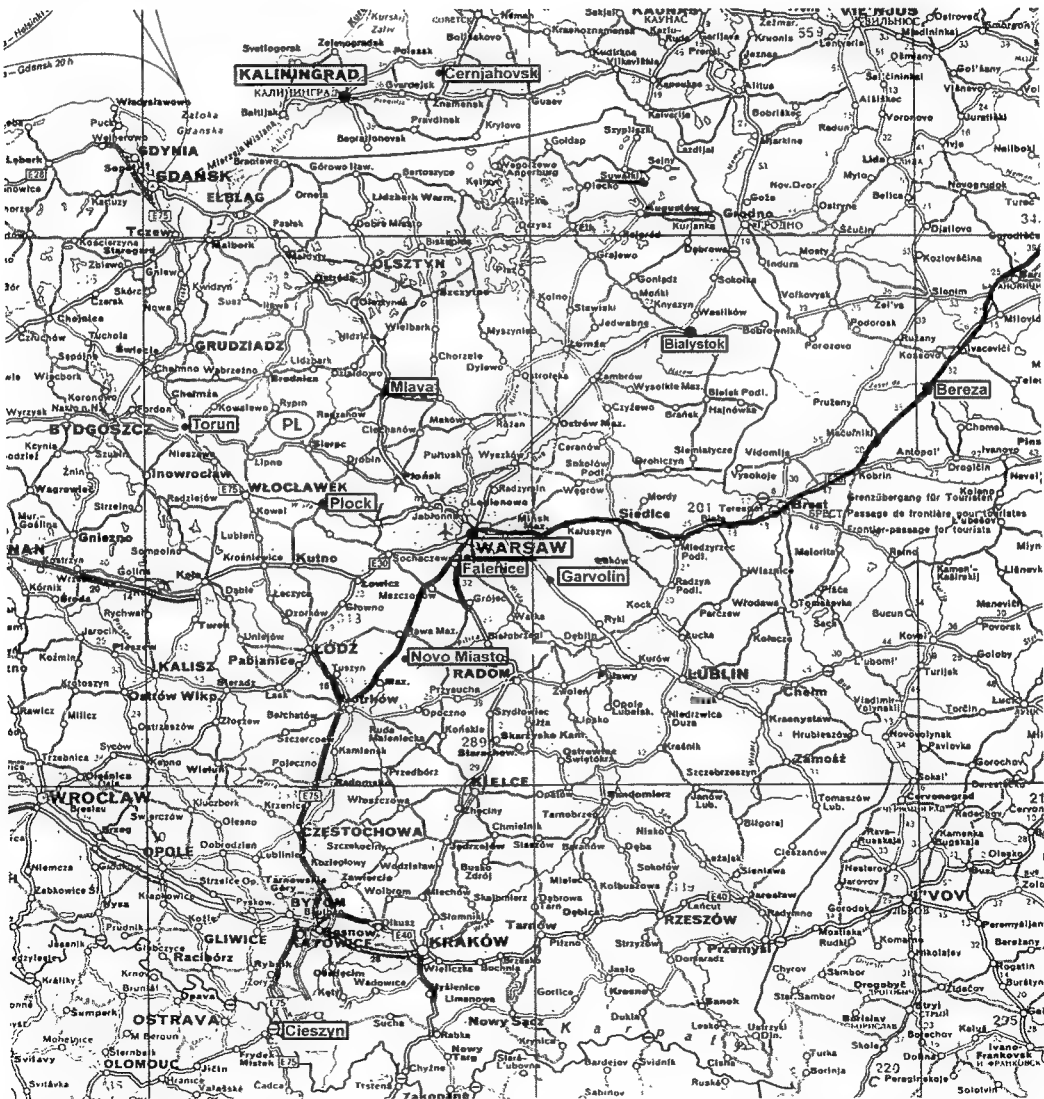
On September 17, 1939, while the Germans were fighting Poland, the Polish policemen at the concentration camp near Bereza ran away and left the keys to the mayor of the town. The next day, September 18, 1939, the mayor sent ten volunteer firemen (six Jews and four Christians) to open the gates and let the prisoners free. Joseph Kamintzky, one of the Jewish firemen who tried to keep order, was killed by Polish farmers who arrived to loot the prison warehouses, which contained food and clothing. This man had worked for my father as a shoemaker. On September 19, 1939, the Red Army entered the camp and freed everyone.



Shortly after I came home in December 1938, I passed the examination for over tailor (to make the upper parts of shoes and boots for ladies and men) so I could open my own shop. The examination went without a hitch. In fact, I was greeted as a hero by the officials because I was the only one from our town who was mobilized and served in the Polish Army at Cieszyn. Before I sat down to take the test an announcement was made in the examination hall. I was whisked right through it and I got a diploma to open a shop as an over tailor. All soldiers who participated in the operation at Cieszyn were given a certificate by the Polish government, which entitled them to get any job they wanted.

I started to organize myself. I rented a place, bought two industrial sewing machines and all the equipment for the shop and started to work. I wasn't able to work very long.

On March 23, 1939, only three months after I had come home from the Polish Army, and had participated in the German trickery against the Czechs, I received another mobilization call. I was told to appear within 24 hours in the Army, Artillery 75 mm caliber. This time Poland was preparing to defend itself against the Germans, after the Germans had tricked Poland into joining them in dividing up Czechoslovakia. The Germans had much stronger military equipment now, because they took a lot of tanks, bombers and ammunition from the Czechs. Now when they declared war against Poland they were in a much better military position.



**Map #4: Defense of Poland and German Prison Camp:** Berezę is located on the Yasholda River where it intersects the road connecting Warsaw, Brest, Minsk, Smolensk (not shown), and Moscow (not shown). Berezę is about 70 miles from Brest, 200 miles from Warsaw, and 500 miles from Moscow.

I had to give up everything and return again to the Army uniform, rifle and cannon to protect the Polish borders from Hitler's invading forces. In the beginning our regiment took its place around Warsaw, Novo Miasto, and Nasieleszko Plock (see Map #4). Then we moved to Mława, about three miles (five km) from the German border. We were maneuvering behind this border for over six months expecting an attack from the Germans any day. On September 1, 1939, Hitler's army attacked us on the entire front bordering Germany.

First we saw their reconnaissance planes circling around our positions. Then came the bombers, artillery and tanks. At the same time the Germans bombed and destroyed all the Polish military air fields. There was no chance to stand our ground and oppose the attack. We stood our position for a few hours by using our cannons against the Germans, but it wasn't long before we had to retreat quickly toward Warsaw. The roads to Warsaw were jammed with destroyed cannons, vehicles, and the bodies of dead horses and Polish soldiers. We were forced to take the back roads in order to reach Warsaw. We hoped to see English bombers coming to our rescue. Before Germany attacked Poland, England had promised Poland that they would come to our aid. Every time we saw a bomber coming close to us we thought, "It's English." Instead, it was German and we were bombed or sprayed with machine gun fire. The English government never fulfilled its promise and we never saw an English bomber.

We marched mostly at night over back roads which were congested with Polish troops in retreat. The horses dragged our cannons through the sandy roads. By day we stopped in the woods for shelter. One night while we stopped on the road for a few hours, I found out that my brother's regiment was in the cavalry behind us. I took a horse and rode to meet him, hollering his name, "Gershon." He did the same and our voices touched in the midnight air. We found each other and embraced with surprise and joy. We couldn't stay together too long because our regiments were already starting to move again in retreat. I shared some food with him that I had from my reserves, then we had to part and wish each other good luck. While we were retreating, the German bombers, tanks and artillery followed us and hit us from all sides. We didn't have much of a chance to fight them because we did not have enough ammunition in reserve.

On September 16, 1939, we reached the town of Garwolin (see Map #4), not far from Warsaw. We couldn't enter Warsaw because it was surrounded by German troops. We took our position in the woods behind Garwolin, positioned the cannons and settled the horses. We were all exhausted and hungry. Suddenly, we were attacked on all sides by small German tanks which were hidden in the woods. No one suspected that they were there. They destroyed all eight of our cannons and killed most of our soldiers. I managed to escape on horseback into the woods and galloped away but I wasn't able to go too far before my horse was shot and killed. I was slightly wounded in the behind but was able to escape. I managed to crawl on all fours until I was completely out of sight in the thicker bushes. I then stood up and ran while the bullets were whistling all around me. I joined other Polish troops trying to enter Warsaw. We carried our rifles and bayonets but were unable to shoot because we had no ammunition.



# **Chapter Five:**

## **Prisoner of War in Germany**

**SEPTEMBER 1939 - MAY 1940**

On the evening of September 17, 1939, we reached Falenice (see Map #4), a resort about 12 miles (20 km) from Warsaw. Thousands of Polish troops who were trying to reach Warsaw had congregated there. The city was surrounded by the German Army and no one could get in or out. It was Yom Kippur that night and what I witnessed was horrible. The Germans set the houses on fire to light up the area and then surrounded our troops. We had no ammunition with which to defend ourselves. When some soldiers tried to escape they jumped a wire fence and were met with German machine gun fire. The bodies of the soldiers hung on the fences. All of a sudden, a Polish Captain appeared behind me, yelling, "Why don't you go forward to shoot the Germans?" he screamed. I told him that I had no bullets. He said, "Go ahead and meet them with your bayonet. If you don't, I'll shoot you myself." I had no choice. I knew I had to follow the Captain's insane order even though I had no chance against their machine guns with my bayonet. I crawled on all fours, going forward like a snake. The German bullets were whistling all around me. I looked behind me and I saw that the stupid Captain was lying on the ground in a pool of blood. He had been killed by the German bullets. I sneaked into an underground bunker and found another twenty Polish soldiers hiding there. None of us had any bullets. We spent the entire night there listening to the shooting. In the morning a German soldier came over to the opening and ordered all the Polish soldiers to come out or he would drop a bomb inside.

We left our useless rifles inside and came out empty handed. He dropped a bomb inside the bunker and searched us thoroughly. He took us to a place where thousands of Polish soldiers were held as war prisoners. I was glad that I was not alone because they might kill a small number of prisoners and get rid of them right away, not bothering with imprisonment. Immediately, without giving us food or water, the Germans began to drive us on foot, like sheep, toward the German border. On the way I saw they had already rounded up Jewish people from Warsaw and the surrounding areas. They were driving them on the same route, in the same direction, but they appeared worse off than we were. They were hungry, without food, and some were elderly and frail. Those who could not keep pace were beaten over the head with rifles until they died and pushed to the side. You could hear the terrible screaming from the pain and torture the Nazis barbarously inflicted on the weak and innocent Jews. It was very painful for me to see and hear it, but I could do nothing to help them. The road was covered with Jewish blood and dead bodies. As we passed, some of the victims were still struggling between life and death.

The Germans wanted to teach us a lesson to warn us that we shouldn't dare try to escape. They took us out in the field where thousands of prisoners were lined up in front of five Jewish war prisoners. The Germans declared that those Jewish prisoners had tried to escape, and had been brought there to be punished. A squadron of German soldiers opened fire on the helpless innocent Jewish prisoners and they fell to the ground, instantly dead. They were shot in front of all the other war prisoners as an example of what could happen to anyone who tried to escape. It broke my heart.

The next day they stopped us in Kameniec Mazowieck and drove us into the backyard of a church. It was surrounded by a fence and guarded by German soldiers, so that no one could escape. We had no food and were hungry. Some people in the neighboring area tried to hand us food through the fence, but

the Germans chased them away. Some of us had money but you couldn't buy food with it. Money was worthless - you couldn't eat it. Across the street from the churchyard, there was a railroad station. The Germans were constructing something there.

I watched as four German soldiers loaded a heavy 30-foot long log on the shoulders of two elderly civilian Jews and told them to carry it to the construction site. They couldn't even move with it. The German soldiers jumped on the log, sadistically adding their body weight, so as to break the old men's bones. The two poor, elderly Jews couldn't stand the heavy weight and collapsed under the log. The four soldiers proceeded to kick them in the head, face and body and then pushed them aside, dead.

Many such cruelties and barbaric actions went on all day. It was so heartbreaking to witness the evil acts committed upon the helpless Jews by the German soldiers.

That day in the churchyard I met a "landsman" (a person from the same town or area) from Bereza Kartuzka. He was a war prisoner, like myself, and from then on we kept close together. The next day the Germans gave us some crackers to eat. We gobbled them up in a minute and were hungry once again. They drove us farther to the German border. When we came close to the border they loaded us on trucks and brought us to a prisoner of war camp (see Map #4), Stalag 1A in Insterburg (now called Cernjahovsk or Chernyakhovsk), part of East Prussia (now a part of Russia called Kaliningrad), not far from the city of Koenigsberg (now also called Kaliningrad).

There they gave us a sanitary examination and registered the names of the Jewish war prisoners. They separated the Jews right away. All the prisoners had to put a red triangle on the back of their jackets. The Jewish prisoners had to wear an additional Star of David on the knee pants.

My landsman and I realized what was happening. When we were asked to identify ourselves, we didn't admit to our Jewish faith or give Jewish names. I told them, "I'm White-Russian. I'm a Protestant and my name is Vasil Kabranov." My landsman changed his name to Karl Zarachowicz. Everyone got a numbered tag to wear around their necks for identification purposes. We slept in tents on the ground like cattle. The Jewish prisoners were in a separate tent and the Germans tormented them more often.

Every half hour they lined us up outside to count us over and over to make sure that no one had escaped. If someone didn't move fast enough, the soldier hit him with the butt of his rifle all over the body. I got hit many times. They gave us about a third of a loaf of bread (200 grams) and a plate of soup as daily rations. The soup was as thin as water.

After several frustrating weeks of confinement in the barracks, I saw one of the German soldiers making a list and asking the prisoners if they were farmers. Right away I put my name on the list and so did my "landsman" Karl. The same day they transferred us to a farm, in the village of Wolfshahe, fourteen miles (23 km) from Orianenburg. It was run by the German government under the observation of an S.S. Hoptman (captain) from the German Army. He was stationed in Augustow and Suwalki, in occupied Poland. His wife was the manager of the farm and once a week he would return to inspect his land. It was a big farm, approximately 2000 acres. Twenty prisoners worked the land, together with the hired German workers, harvesting the crops from the fields under the guard of two German soldiers. Among the twenty Polish prisoners there were a few Ukrainians and us, the two "White Russians." No one knew that we were Jews.



After a while our Polish comrades, the Polish prisoners, suspected that we were both Jews. "A Pole or Ukrainian can recognize a Jew in fire or water." Some used to ask me, "Is your friend, Karl, Jewish?" I would say, "No." They asked Karl about me, also. He would also answer, "No." They tried to find out whether we were Jews even though we were all just prisoners. It bothered them that we might be Jewish and that we were being treated the same as they were. They wanted to see us tortured and dead, even though their own fate would not become any more secure.

After a few weeks my "landsman", Karl, got sick with arthritis. He couldn't work because of the pain. (He was only 23 years old.) They sent him back to Stalag 1A in Insterburg, where he worked as a shoe repairman. The Germans never found out that he was a Jew. He survived the war and is now living in New York City.

Several weeks after Karl was transported to the camp in Insterburg, the S.S. captain came over to us while we were eating breakfast, before we went to work in the fields. He asked us who had been in the artillery in the Polish Army. I was the only one, but I was afraid to admit it. I thought he had something against it, and maybe he was looking to take revenge. No one responded to his inquiry. He explained to us that he needed a man who knew his way around horses, because the man that took care of the horses had been called to the army. I knew that to be true, for I knew the man he spoke of, so I stepped forward and took the job taking care of the horses.

After that, I didn't have to go into the fields and no one guarded me on my job in the barn. There were forty horses to feed, water and care for. I had to pump water from a well that was about three hundred feet away. I had a two-wheeled pushcart with a barrel on the top. I had to wheel it to the stall, then take the water out with a pail and fill the horse troughs. Three times a day I had to give the horses oats and hay. I also had to clean them with a brush and put straw for bedding on the floor every day. Here I worked harder than in the field and was responsible for the horses, but I felt free, without the interference or the surveillance of the army guard watching me. This gave me some hope and prospects for escape. From the moment that I was taken prisoner, escaping was my main priority.

Five hundred feet from the barn was a stable for cows. Two of the prisoners were working there to help feed and milk the cows. One day I heard someone screaming loudly and yelling in pain, "Oh, Jesus, Oh Jesus." What had happened? A prisoner was hauling a rickshaw with a German worker, who was a strong bully. The rickshaw was fully loaded with beets for the cows. While they were carrying it down the cement stairs to the cows, the Polish prisoner stumbled and fell off the stairs. The German worker, who was in front of him got mad and started kicking him, all over the head, face and body. He knocked out all of his teeth and almost blinded him. That man was sick for a long time and couldn't work anymore. They sent him back to Stalag 1A. He probably died there.

We were given breakfast in the morning before we went to work, and supper when we returned. Then we went to our lodge, on the second floor of a brick building, to rest. The windows and doors were covered with iron bars. At eleven o'clock in the evening the guard checked on us. He took away our clothing then so that we would not be able to escape and locked the doors upstairs and downstairs. No one lived downstairs. In the morning he opened the two doors, loosened the iron bars and returned our clothing.

In 1939 when the Germans defeated Poland they were very pleased. I used to talk with them once in a while, but in 1940 when they invaded Britain and France, they had a lot of casualties. I heard the German workers complaining that their sons and brothers died in the war with England. The English shot down a lot of German airplanes. They said that the Jews caused the war and blamed the deaths of

their relatives on the Jews. They said that the Jews were responsible for everything and should be killed and wiped out. I felt happy when they complained about their loss, as if somehow a minute bit of revenge had occurred.

I took good care of the horses. They were hard working animals. The S.S. captain came home frequently from Suvalki, to check on the farm and on the horses to see if I was treating them well. He approved of my work and started to talk to me about accepting German citizenship. He said I just had to sign a paper, then I could be free, no longer a prisoner. I could even marry a German girl. I told him, "No, I want to wait until the end of the war and then I'll return home to White Russia." Every time he came home to the farm, though, he would repeat his proposal for me to become a German citizen. I continued to refuse his offer. He told me that after the war was over, if I returned home, the Russians would send me to a work camp in Siberia. Again I said no. He would then say to me, "Vasil, you are a good man. You don't want to listen to me, but I give you good advice."

I knew what was on his mind. Once I became a German citizen, they would put me in Hitler's army and send me to the front, to fight my own people. He didn't know what was on my mind...to escape, POSITIVELY. Right from the beginning my mind was made up. I would escape.

Once I saw a German worker holding a newspaper with a map of the territory the Germans had taken from Poland in the 1939 war. I asked if I could have the map to look at it and he gave it to me. It was very useful because it showed all the cities, towns, borders and rivers. I hid it in my pocket, knowing that some day I would make good use of it. The map would serve as my compass when the time came for me to escape. My plan was to wait until summer when the wheat fields were high enough to hide in. No one knew about the map and it became a holy object to me.

One day, May 20, 1940, the German Army guard came over to the stall where I was working on the horses and asked me, "Vasil, bistu jude?" (Are you a Jew?) I answered, "Obervu," absolutely not. He didn't ask me any more questions and left. I didn't like that. I understood that some of the Polish prisoners learned to speak a little German and it bothered them that I was okay and still alive, even though we were all in the same situation - war prisoners in Germany. I even knew one of them, because he often bothered me about my identity. He told the army guard that I was probably a Jew.

I didn't lose much time. I saw that I was in a dangerous situation. The Poles betrayed me and told the Germans that I was positively a Jew. I planned a quick escape then and there. If I delayed, it might be too late.

# Chapter Six: Escape

**MAY 1940 - JUNE 1940**

The time was right. I had been on the farm for nine months. It was May 20, 1940, a Sunday. Every Sunday afternoon the German Army guard went to the town of Orianenburg to get drunk. He returned at eleven o'clock at night to take our clothing away and lock us up. That night was the right occasion for me. I spoke with some of the other prisoners and asked them if they wanted to join me in the escape. Three of them, a Pole and two Ukrainians, agreed to go with me. I looked around in the stall and found equipment to loosen the iron bars and hinges from the wooden door jams. I removed the iron bars and rubbed soap on them, then I set them back in place. They would be easy to take out later that night. I did everything as I had planned without any suspicion from the German neighbors in the village of Wolfshahe. That night at eleven o'clock, when the German guard came to lock us in, he was stone drunk, exactly as I predicted. He asked me (because I was the only one that could translate his German to Polish), "Vasil, is ales in ordenung?" I answered, "Yavol." Yes, everything is all right. I handed him the clothing which he took and put behind the door. He locked us up without showing any suspicion. We waited impatiently until midnight, but there were some youngsters outside. I looked through the window and finally it was quiet - no one was around. Then it was time for action.

The four of us were ready. We were wearing only our undershirts because the guard had taken away our clothing. Quietly and carefully I worked on the bars that I had loosened, soaped up, and set back into place. I had to push the bars out and lower them down to the ground without any noise. I attached a wire to the bars and lowered them very slowly. It was very important not to wake up the Nazi murderer who lived next door. Silently, I pushed the soaped up hinges out from the wooden jams. That operation was successful and the rest of the prisoners were cooperative. We opened the door, said goodbye to those remaining behind bars, and grabbed our clothing. We were able to unfasten the downstairs door in the same way, quietly and successfully. We were free to run our journey home!

One hundred fifty feet from the barn was a wheat field, about four feet high - enough to hide us. We jumped into the wheat and started to run southeast toward the Russian border, following my plan and with the help of the map. I used the Big Dipper to guide us, as this constellation was always in the northern part of the sky and enabled us to get our bearings. It was like having a stellar compass that glowed in the dark.

After we ran about six miles (10 km), we stopped in some bushes that were familiar to us. We were on the farm. We rested for approximately a half hour, but we couldn't stay there too long. When we tried to get up, we could not move because our legs had become stiff like wood. Slowly they loosened up and came back, giving us the strength to continue our escape to freedom.

We walked all night in the fields until about four o'clock in the morning when it started to become light. By then, the farmers were getting ready to come out into the field to milk the cows.

We were lucky, we made about eighteen miles (30 km) that first night. We stayed down in the wheat to rest for the day. We had our food right in front of us. We ate the green wheat kernels that surrounded us. They were almost ripe enough to be cut down. When we were thirsty, we drank the green swamp water. The swamps were filled with insects and worms, but no one got sick from drinking the water.

We were exposed only to the birds. That was dangerous because when the crows and eagles spotted us in the wheat field they circled above and called attention to us with their calls. Luckily, the Germans didn't notice the birds and their cries.

We had to be on the watch while we were resting in the field. As a precaution, we always kept someone on guard while the others slept. I was especially concerned, for as a Jew I knew what would be waiting for me if I were caught by the Germans.

We were in the field from four o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock at night and then we cautiously started our journey again. We continued traveling this way and always looked to the Big Dipper to give us our direction north.

One day, after a night's walk in the field, we stopped in the wheat about 3:30 in the morning, before it started to get light. Later on, at about 8:00 A.M. we heard the sounds of marching soldiers and their commanders' voices. We were terrified and tried to stay calm. There was a German Army training camp nearby which we failed to see when we stopped in the dark at 3:30 A.M. We clung to the ground for the rest of the day without moving.

At about 10:00 A.M. we heard the officer in command lining up the company in front of him. Then he read out loud a communique that he had just received. It said that four Polish war prisoners had just escaped from camp and might be in the area. He divided up the soldiers and ordered them to search the roads to find the escaped prisoners. They spread out for the operation but we were right under their noses. They never imagined that we might be hiding in the wheat fields right in front of them!

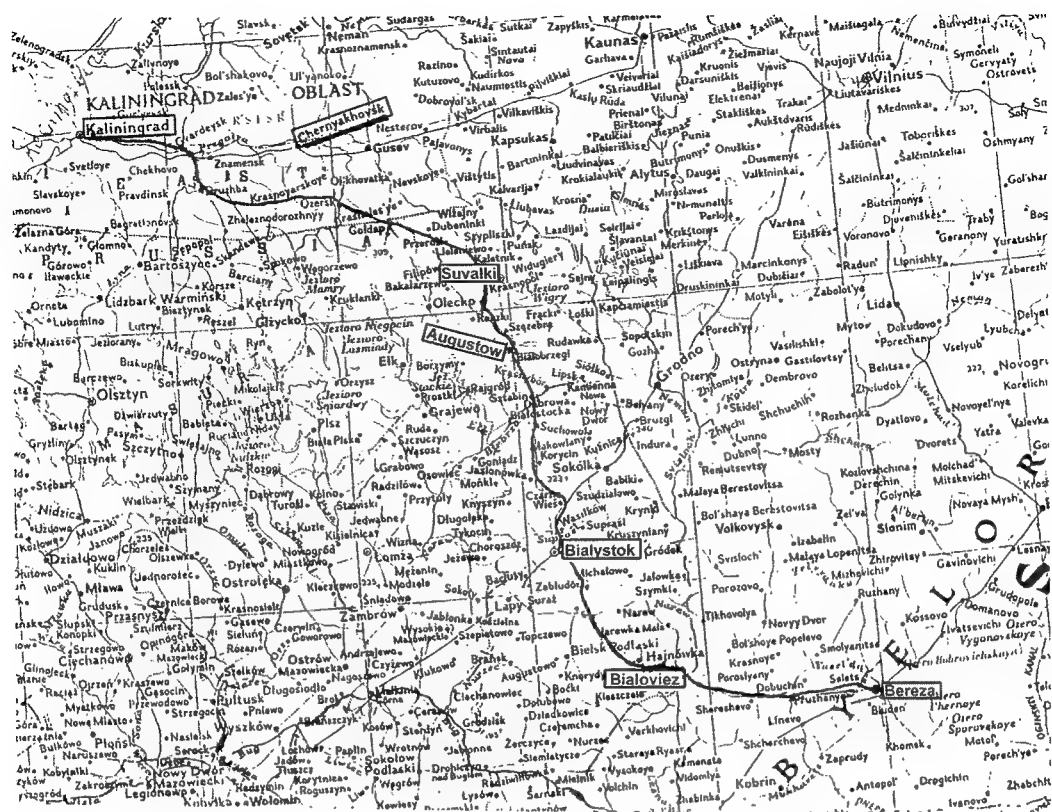
We were lucky. They did not find us. At 5:00 P.M. they returned from the search empty handed and marched away to their headquarters. Not one of them looked in the wheat fields. If they had a dog it would have sniffed us out easily. When it got dark we were glad to leave that place and quietly continued on our way.

On the fourth day, the oldest man, who was thirty, couldn't travel any longer. He became weak and couldn't move his legs. We had to leave him near a village before we started our night's walk. He was from Bialystock, Poland. The three of us, two Ukrainians and myself, continued on the journey home.

On cloudy nights we could not move because we didn't have our trusty Big Dipper to guide us. If we traveled without direction we might wind up back in Germany, in the hands of the Nazis. So we remained in the wheat field waiting for the stars to come out and then we continued.

One morning, at about four o'clock, just as the day was starting to lighten, we passed a farmer's house near a village. There were sweet peas growing in front of the house, and we took a chance to pick some. As soon as we went into the garden, we heard a click as the door opened. The owner saw us and started to yell, calling to other people in the house. We didn't lose any time. Quickly we jumped the fence and ran toward the forest which was only about half a mile (1 km) away. We heard shooting behind us. When we reached the forest we turned and saw some German farmers chasing us, but we were faster. They never caught up with us. We snuck into the forest and disappeared from sight. After that, we never again tried to go near a German village.

In the summer, the German farmers drive their cows out in to the fields and the cows remain there, day and night, for the entire summer. In the morning, after four A.M., the farmers come out to the pasture to milk them. We thought it would be a good source of food for us. So a few times before the



**Map #5: The Escape Route.** As a prisoner of war, I worked on a farm in a small village called Wolfshahe, near Interburg (which is now called Chernyakhovsk). On May 20, 1940, I escaped from the farm and made my way across occupied Poland back to my home in Berezka. I traveled at night hidden in wheat fields. The escape route covered 400 miles and took me one month.

farmers arrived, we tried to catch a cow and get some milk. But we were not lucky enough. As soon as the cows saw us coming close to them they ran away. They probably recognized that we were not their owners. So we gave up trying.

We continued our journey in the fields through swamps, quicksand and rivers. It was very dangerous to cross the areas with quicksand and very easy to sink into the ground. We had to crawl on all fours in order not to get caught in the soft earth. As this part of the journey was very hard and dangerous, the two Ukrainians revolted against me, accusing me of leading them in the wrong direction. I told them that I wasn't leading them, that I was going my own way. They followed me anyway. When we had to cross the River Narev, I didn't want to go over the main bridge because I feared that we would be captured. I chose to keep away from the roads and bridges. I knew that we would have to swim across the river, but the two Ukrainians couldn't swim. I helped them through the water and we made it, but always it was with extreme hardship.

After a few weeks of traveling through the areas with lakes, swamps and quicksand we were close to the Russian border around Suwalki (see Map #5). As always, early in the morning before daylight we lodged in a wheat field. We did not know that there was a farm house nearby. The Ukrainians fell asleep right away and I was on watch at about five o'clock in the morning. It was already light outside. I heard

people speaking in Polish. Listening to their conversation, I learned that they were Polish farmers working their land. I immediately awoke the two Ukrainians and we continued listening to their conversation. We found out that they disliked the Germans and were speaking against them with hatred. They still didn't see us. We decided to come out of our hiding place in the wheat field. We approached them and introduced ourselves. They were standing there, with their scythes in their hands, getting ready to cut the hay in the field. We told them the truth. We said that we were Polish war prisoners, who had escaped from a German prison camp, and that we were trying to get home to our families in Russia.

They greeted us very heartily and invited us into their home, which was far from other settlements. It stood in the area like an oasis by itself. The woman of the house immediately prepared a good breakfast for us. We were very appreciative and thanked them. Those people were very depressed from being under German occupation. They told us that we could stay there as long as we wished. They would tell no one, so that we would be safe from the Germans. They were a family of five. The woman told us that her son was also in a German war prison camp, Stalag 1A, the same one that we had been in. So she was very glad to help us. She said that maybe someone would help her dear son in the same way. They were very good to us and were concerned that we had enough to eat. They insisted on slaughtering a pig just for us, and said that if they didn't the Germans would take it anyway.

We slept in the barn in the hay. We had a good rest for three days, good food and the wonderful, kind company of friendly people. They wanted us to stay longer but we were very anxious to go home to our own families. We decided to continue on our way. It was about fifteen miles (twenty-five km) to the German-Russian border. They tried their best to help us. They gave us a loaf of bread and a salami. They also gave us directions to a village that was only two miles (three km) from the border, and the name and address of a Polish forest ranger who lived near the border and used to work for the Polish government. He knew all the hiding places and how to escape without being caught.

We thanked them very much for all the goodness that they had shown us. We were lucky and appreciated meeting these good people who helped us so willingly. We said goodbye and wished them the best for their son, who was in Stalag 1A. They wished us good luck on our journey, and we departed in the direction they sent us.

It took us almost a whole day to reach the village that was near the German-Russian border. We met the ranger, told him our story, and explained who had recommended that we come to him for help. He was very nice and friendly and told us to hide in his barn and sleep in the hay. He advised us to wait until the weather turned stormy because in good weather it was very difficult to cross the border unnoticed. He explained that on a dry day when you walk in the forest everything you step on breaks and makes a noise. The sound of footsteps carries and can be heard very far away. He told us that the border was in the woods and that it was also very dangerous to be in the woods during a storm. Once two escaped Polish war prisoners tried to cross the border in a thunderstorm. They were found dead under a tree which had been hit by lightning. This account did not discourage us, because crossing the border was our only chance to escape. We accepted his advice and his generosity to lodge in his barn. We had to be very silent so as not to arouse suspicion from the neighbors or the Germans.

Luckily, on the second evening there was a violent storm with wind, heavy rain, thunder and lightning. That was what we were waiting for. It was like a miracle, like "Moses splitting the Red Sea." The ranger came and told us to prepare for the journey.

At midnight we started out. He walked with us for one mile (one and half km) through the woods. We stopped and he gave us directions to the border which was another mile away. He told us there

would be a large barbed wire fence, twelve feet high on the German side, and another fence about one hundred feet away on the Russian side. Between the fences the ground was covered with sand. This allowed the guards to follow any tracks and learn in which direction the person was going.

We thanked him for all his help and told him that he was like a good angel. We had nothing to compensate him with for his heroic goodness. He accepted our gratitude in mere words and we went off toward the border.

The situation was on our side. It was raining and there was a great deal of thunder and lightning. No one could hear us moving through the woods. The thunder was coming in one boom after another and with tremendous searing sounds, but it did not scare us. We were glad no one was in our way, no border guards on horses or with dogs.

When we came to the border, there was a twelve foot high barbed wire fence. We climbed over it instantly, not feeling the sharp barbs. We leaped over the fence without difficulty, even though in peacetime we would never have been able to surmount even a much lower fence. In the back of my mind was the real possibility that I could be caught then and there.

My strong optimism and desire to survive gave me the energy and vigor to overcome every obstacle in the path of my escape. Ultimately, I wanted to see Hitler and his Nazi murderers put to death. That thought radiated in me and gave me the strength to continue. It was the power of mind over matter. I believed in myself and felt that it was my duty to inform my family and the world about the brutal atrocities which Hitler was inflicting upon innocent people, especially the Jewish people.

In a matter of seconds we were over the fence. My only injury was my bleeding hands. We landed in the sand on the other side of the fence. We all walked backwards in the sand so as to give the impression that we had crossed from the Russian border to the German border. The Russian border guards would see our footprints later.

About one hundred feet ahead there was a second barbed wire fence. We climbed over and were on the Russian side. I was very relieved to be out of German territory. We walked alongside the forest for about eight miles (thirteen km) in the direction of Augustow. On the way we stopped at a Russian-occupied village. We thought that we were already on friendly ground and near where we were born. We stepped into one of the homes in the village and told the people there our story. They told us that the Russian Stalinist government had prohibited the townspeople from helping anyone who crossed the border illegally.

We went to another house and the reaction was exactly the same. In one house, the man told us to sit down in an unfriendly tone. When he left the house, we became suspicious. I was worried that he might inform the K.G.B. (Russian Secret Police). We left quickly, ran into the woods, and from then on we knew that we would have to be careful in our own country. We did not want to be captured by the Stalinist K.G.B. This experience reminded me of what the owner of the farm in Germany had told me. "When you return home to Russia, Stalin's Secret Police will arrest you and send you to Siberia."

Now we traveled very carefully, day and night, using the same routine. We rested wherever we could find a safe place to hide so that the police would not see us. We knew that if we were caught, we would be arrested and sent to one of the labor camps in Siberia. We went by Bialystock (see Map #5) and then continued on farther east, closer to our home towns. We still had to rely on the wheat kernels in the field for food, because we were afraid that the local people might spot us and turn us over to the police.

In a few days we came to the village of Bialowiez, which is on the western edge of the forest of the same name. The Bialowiez Forest is the largest woods in Poland and in all of Europe. This forest is inhabited by wild animals such as boars, bears, and wolves. Before the war, many world leaders such as Mussolini and Hitler came to hunt the animals for pleasure.

Alongside the village was a swift stream which had thick bushes on both banks. On the farther bank was the beginning of the Bialowiez Forest (see Map #5). I thought to myself, if there is an emergency, I will jump into the water and come out of the stream on the other side. And so it happened, just as I had imagined. Suddenly, we heard a voice calling, "Stop! Stop or I'll shoot!" I turned and saw two Russian policemen with rifles, ready to fire. I instantly slipped into the bushes and into the fast-running stream. The force of the water carried me away from the pursuers. In less than a minute I climbed out on the other side of the river and into the forest "to keep company" with the wildlife. The two Ukrainians were not so fortunate. Unable to swim, they were captured by the two Russian policemen.

The desire to be free was the force which kept me going. I wanted to go home and see my family and friends. I felt that I had to tell them about the brutality and cruelty of Hitler's regime. I knew that the thick forest was home to many dangerous animals but my spirits were lifted by the thought that I was getting closer to home. I continued my journey and tried to protect myself from the animals. I was careful to stay away from them to avoid being attacked. These animals are especially dangerous when they have their young with them. A few times I saw wild boars running with their babies. The mother was always in front with the babies following right behind, all with their heads facing the ground. I hid behind a big tree whenever I heard them coming, because I knew that these animals cannot see far when they have their heads down. Their skeletal structure keeps them from raising their heads. I was lucky, they never caught sight of me. Once I saw a bear far away. Luckily he did not see me, but I was ready to climb a tree.

It took a whole day to walk through this wilderness. Toward evening I came out of the woods. I was still unable to find anyone who would give me food or shelter because people lived in terror. Anyone I asked refused to help, fearful of the Stalinist Police and of being sent to Siberia. I still had to depend on the wheat kernels in the field. Some of the crops were already cut and ready to harvest.

It took me two days to walk to the town of Malch, a village ten and a half miles (seventeen km) from my town, Bereza Kartuzka. I had a cousin, Velie Goldstein, a widow, who lived in Malch with her two children. I think her son's name was David, and her daughter's name was Miriam. The children were away at their jobs. Velie was glad to see me. Somehow my family learned that I was staying with her. My two brothers came right away to get me and we went home together on their bikes.

I arrived in Bereza on about the 20th of June, 1940. It had taken me about one month to cover the four hundred miles of my escape route. Everyone at home was so glad to see me return. My whole family was there waiting to greet me. My mother, father, brothers and sister were there. My sister, Esther, was there with her husband and six-month old infant. My Uncle Nachman and his family and many friends came to the house to see me. The whole town was happy to see me back home, and I was glad to see them still alive and at home. A few of my friends were missing. They were mobilized the same day that I was and had fallen in battle against Germany in 1939.



## Chapter Seven:

# The Russian Prison and Labor Camp

**JUNE 1940 - SPRING 1942**

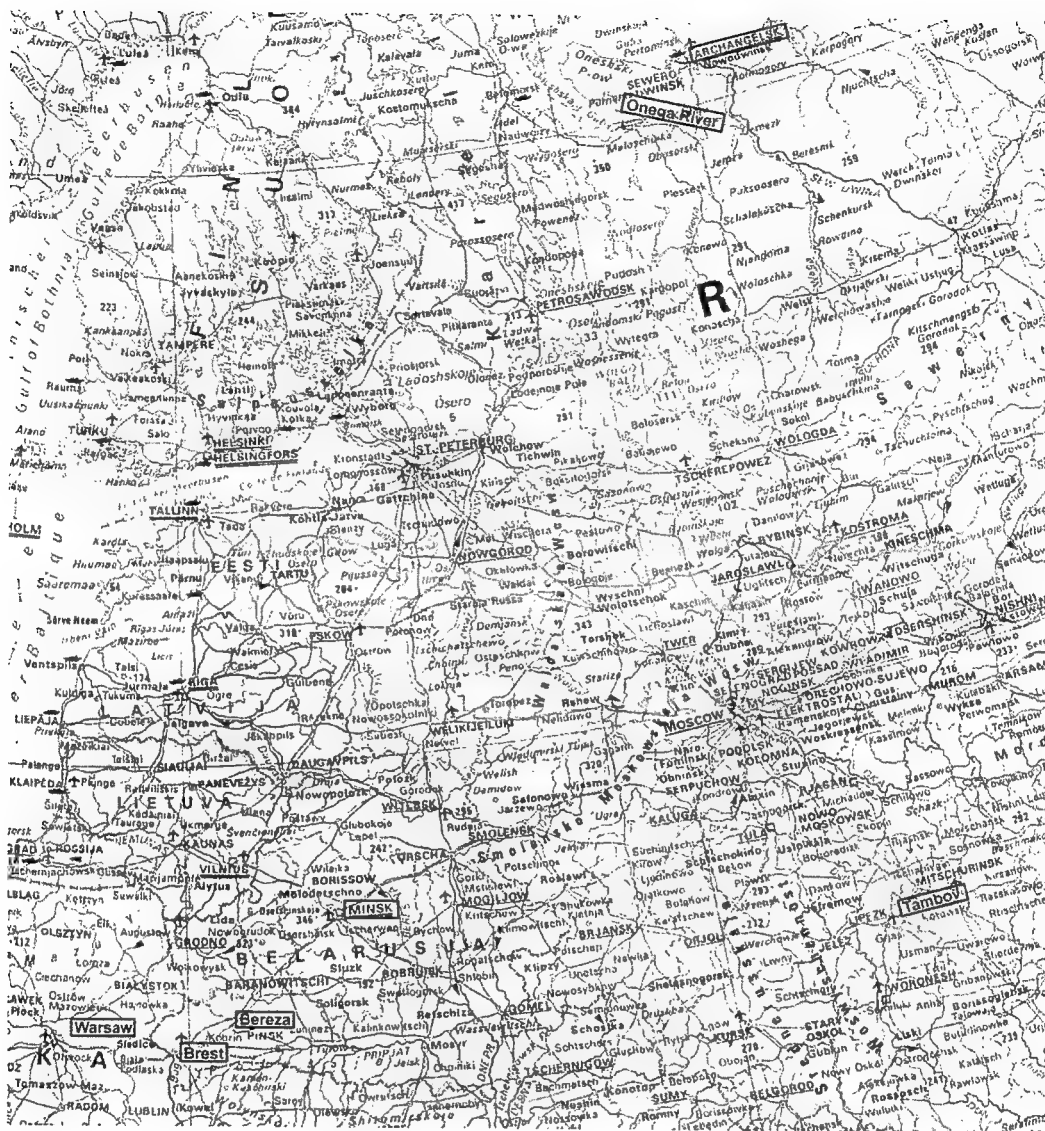
The next day I went to the Russian Magistrate to register my return from exile as a war prisoner in Germany. I was given a very cold reception and told to come back in a few days to get my documents. I returned a few days later to the office, but the documents were still not prepared. The K.G.B. (Russian Secret Police) dragged out the processing of my residency papers. Meanwhile on Friday, six days after returning home, my family, relatives and friends were preparing a welcome home celebration for me the next afternoon.

I remember this night before the Saturday party. Everyone was peacefully asleep. At two o'clock in the morning we heard a knock at the door. My sister went down and asked who was there. They told her that it was the N.K.V.D., (the Russian Intelligence). They asked for me and my sister told them that I was sleeping. They ordered her to open the door. They woke me up, and told me to get dressed. I had to go with them to the Magistrate's Office. They said they just had to ask me a few questions and then I could go home. I went with them.

Without any explanation I was taken to the police station. They told me that I was under arrest, and at noon I was told I was being taken to Brest (see Map #6), a bigger central city, about sixty-two miles (one hundred km) away, for further questioning. Two policemen took me to the railroad station at Bludnie, about one mile (one and a half km) away, and then on to Brest. They said that after the questioning was completed I would be able to return to Bereza. This was the procedure that was used to cover up the fact that I was being arrested. Innocently, I believed them, although later I learned that making promises and telling lies were standard procedures for the K.G.B. and the N.K.V.D.

I felt heroic because I had escaped from the German War Prison Camp, Stalag 1A. I was especially proud because I was a Jew and that meant that I had overcome additional barriers and obstacles, but I was not treated like a hero. Instead they brought me to the biggest jail in the county and I realized what the N.K.V.D. had planned. I couldn't believe it. At a huge iron gate, I was stripped and searched by brutal prison guards. I was taken to the third floor, where the guard opened a large iron cell door with a big key. As the door opened, steam poured out of the cell, as if it was a bath. He ordered me to go in, but I couldn't because it was so overcrowded. There wasn't even enough room for me to place my foot in the cell. He pushed me and I fell on top of the other prisoners. The iron door was locked. That cell was built by the Polish government before the war and was designed to house six prisoners. There was room for six beds, but the beds had been removed. Now the Russians jammed seventy-three prisoners into that one cell. It was so crowded that men were sitting in each other's laps. Clearly, the Russian government didn't care that most of the prisoners were innocent, or that some of them got sick and died. They had too many prisoners.

There was only one little window with bars on it, and almost no air to breathe. Everyone was sweating and puffing as if they were in Hell. The leader of the cell asked me why I was arrested and thrown in jail. I told him that I was a soldier in the Polish Army and when Hitler attacked Poland I had been taken prisoner by the Germans. After nine months in prison I had managed a successful escape and had returned home. Then the Russian K.G.B. arrested me at two o'clock in the morning and had brought me to this jail without any explanation.



**Map #6: Archangelsk Labor Camp**

He believed me and accepted my story. He was a Polish nationalist accused of being a counter-revolutionary against the Russians. He gave me a place in the cell near the window so that I would have a little more air to breathe.

I had a big loaf of bread (about four or five pounds) that my parents had given me before I left with the police. They probably suspected what was going to happen to me. I saw that the other prisoners were weak and starving. I gave this loaf of bread to the cell leader and asked him to divide it among the other prisoners. He praised my generosity and took the bread. Then he gave me back half of the loaf while he distributed pieces from the other half to all the prisoners. Everyone thanked me.

Most of the prisoners in the cell were political Polish nationalists who were accused of being counter-revolutionists against the Communist Russian government. They were taken from bed at night,

like myself, and put in jail. Some of them were caught trying to make a living on the black market. All seventy-three of us were so crowded in that small cell that we could hardly breathe. We had to stand or sit tight one up against the other. We were allowed only three minutes for all seventy-three of us in the cell to use the toilet. That wasn't enough time and people got sick from not having their bowel movement for a long time.

We weren't given enough food, only some bread and water in the morning and some soup for supper. There were no showers or baths, and everyone was unshaven, unclean and loaded with lice. The first day I was imprisoned, the lice bit the Hell out of me. Three times a week they took us out to a bigger cell which had no roof. Here we could walk and see the sky, but we were only allowed to stay there for three minutes. The guard stood on the top of the wall watching, to make sure that we didn't talk to each other. Once, while we were out for a walk in the larger cell, the guard called me out and falsely accused me of talking to the prisoner next to me. For punishment, he put me in a small cell, which was only three feet by three feet. The walls of this tiny cell were covered with ice. For two hours, I shivered and froze, and became numb from this sadistic torture.

Political prisoners who were accused of violating Paragraph #64 were often taken from the cell and interrogated for the whole night. (In the Soviet Union, a "paragraph" was a law.) The K.G.B. would torture them, demanding that they provide the names of other counter-revolutionaries. When they were brought back to the cell in the morning, they were unable to walk, stand on their feet, talk or hear. The K.G.B. would tie the prisoners' hands and feet together and hit them on the soles of their feet with a heavy stick. They would also punch them in the face and on their ears. The prisoners were beaten so badly that it took them weeks to recover. Some never returned to our cell. We did not know whether they were alive or dead.

The food and sanitary conditions in the cell were dreadful. I got sick and was terribly constipated, so badly that fecal matter accumulated for many days. It was very painful. I used to put my finger inside my rectum and break it up and pull out pieces that were hard as rocks with blood. Many times, I knocked on the door asking the guard to see a doctor. He only answered, "Don't worry, when you die we will bury you."

The first time they called me out for a hearing they accused me of being sent by the Germans to spy on the Russians. They told me that it would have been impossible for me to escape from the German War Prison Camp, Stalag 1A and make it this far without getting caught. I told them that I was not a spy for the Germans, especially in the light of all the German atrocities against the Jewish people. Those barbarous murderers were the last people on this earth that I would have worked for. The K.G.B. still insisted that I was guilty and gave the judgment of Paragraph #122, that I was spying on the Russians. Approximately a month later they called me out again for another hearing. This time they charged me with Paragraph #120, guilty of "illegally crossing the border."

After eight months of suffering, they called me to a room where three judges sat, dressed in white jackets. They were called the Troika, a three-man court. One of them read my sentence out loud. For illegal passage through the border I was sentenced to three years corrective hard labor in the camp that was on the River Onega in the Archangelsk Forest (see Map #6). The labor camp was so far north, only 200 miles south of the Arctic Circle, that the weather is colder and damper than it is in Siberia. My work would be cutting down trees in the forest and loading them on the Pullman train cars (freight cars). After they read my sentence they put me in another cell that was less crowded, to await transportation to the labor camp. Everyone in this cell had already been sentenced.

In February 1941, after a total of nine months in jail (eight months in the crowded cell and one month in the less crowded cell), I was put on a train for the Archangelsk Forest Labor Camp along with several thousand prisoners. It was a stormy, bitterly cold day and we waited like cattle to be loaded onto the Pullmans. Everyone was given some bread and dried salty fish, enough to last a few days. Then 100 prisoners were squeezed into each Pullman car like herring in a tin can, making each car as overcrowded as the jail cell.

Inside the freight car, the walls, ceilings, floors and windows were covered with icicles. We had to sleep on a floor that was frozen with ice. We were so hungry that we ate all of the dried salty fish at once, and then we were very thirsty, but there was no water to drink. Everyone licked the icy walls and windows. When we yelled for water, the guards opened the doors and threw snow into the railroad car. We were so thirsty that we licked the snow from the floor as the train moved north toward the Archangelsk Forest.

Inside the Pullman it was dark, freezing cold, crowded, and nasty. Every so often, the train stopped and the guards climbed on the roof of the Pullman. They banged on the roof to make sure that no one had tried to break through the roof to escape. One day the train stopped at the Minsk railroad station. We were very thirsty and yelled loudly for water. The residents stopped the guards and asked them about the people inside the cars. The guards pushed the people away and didn't allow them to see us. The guards opened the door wide and threw more snow into the car. Again, we were so thirsty that we licked snow off the floor.

The farther north we went, the colder it got. We were hungry and cried out for bread. Sometimes when the train stopped at a station, the guards opened the doors, and gave us bread and salty dried fish, but they never gave us WATER. Instead they threw snow into the railroad car. Day after day, people became sick with colds and pneumonia. Many prisoners died from the unsanitary conditions. The guards came into the cars, pulled out the dead and we continued farther north. I myself got a bad cold from the icy snow and freezing walls.

For twenty days the train traveled hundreds and hundreds of miles and we didn't see a living soul. There were no settlements, only forests and tundra and snow. It was terrifying to look at this landscape day after day without end, knowing that we were supposed to serve out our sentence in this bitter cold snowy wilderness.

I was so low in health and spirit, that I used to think to myself that a little mouse, whatever its situation, had more freedom than I had. What had I done so terribly wrong to deserve such punishment? A mouse can move about freely, but not me nor the 40,000,000 others like me. The reality of the situation was awful and bitter. After twenty days of suffering in the frigid Pullman cars, we arrived in the city of Archangelsk. Over half of the prisoners had died. Luckily I had made it. The surviving prisoners climbed down from the train and were forced to walk seven and a half miles (twelve km) through the deep snow to the labor camp on the Onega River, all the while enduring the frigid Arctic cold.

The camp was surrounded by a high barbed wire fence. Inside the fence were big uninsulated tents where we were supposed live and to sleep. Inside the tents it was bitterly cold. There was no heat, no stoves, no fire. For beds there were two-story wooden platforms without mattresses. We had to sleep in our clothing and shoes because there were no blankets or pillows. When my shoes were worn out they gave me something made from an old rubber tire to cover my feet. I wrapped rags around my feet to cover them and retain my body heat and then I put the rubber "shoes" on tightly over the rags. The temperature was almost always between minus thirty-five degrees and minus fifty-five degrees Fahren-

heit (thirty-five and fifty degrees below zero Celsius). Sometimes it would even reach minus seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit (sixty degrees below zero Celsius). In these Arctic temperatures we walked four miles (six km) to the forest to cut down trees. Then we dragged the logs out of the woods and rolled them about 500 feet on long wooden rails to the railroad station. The weather was unimaginably frigid and all the labor was done manually.

Later on they built barracks, but the barracks provided no more protection from the cold than the tents because they still did not install heating or stoves. People froze to death while they were asleep. Many times, in the morning, I would awaken to find my neighbor frozen stiff like wood. The next day he was replaced with another person. Many men didn't have the strength to endure such hardship.

The soup that they gave us was nothing more than water and a few pieces of green tomato. The government sent food for us but the camp managers stole it before it came into the camp. They sold the food and bought vodka for themselves while the helpless prisoners died from malnutrition and sickness. When the guards were caught stealing, they were just replaced with a new group of crooks.

In this huge camp that contained about 6,000 prisoners there was another isolated camp inside, surrounded by a twenty-foot barbed wire fence. This camp was inhabited by very dangerous prisoners, who acted like wild vicious animals. They didn't want to work, and if they were allowed to roam free in the camp they would kill other prisoners, strip off their clothing and sell it for cigarettes or a piece of bread. That's why they were separated by a fence and guards. They were very dangerous men. For the time I was there, they killed a few guards when they brought in their food. Everyone called those people "jackals", because they were like that vicious animal.

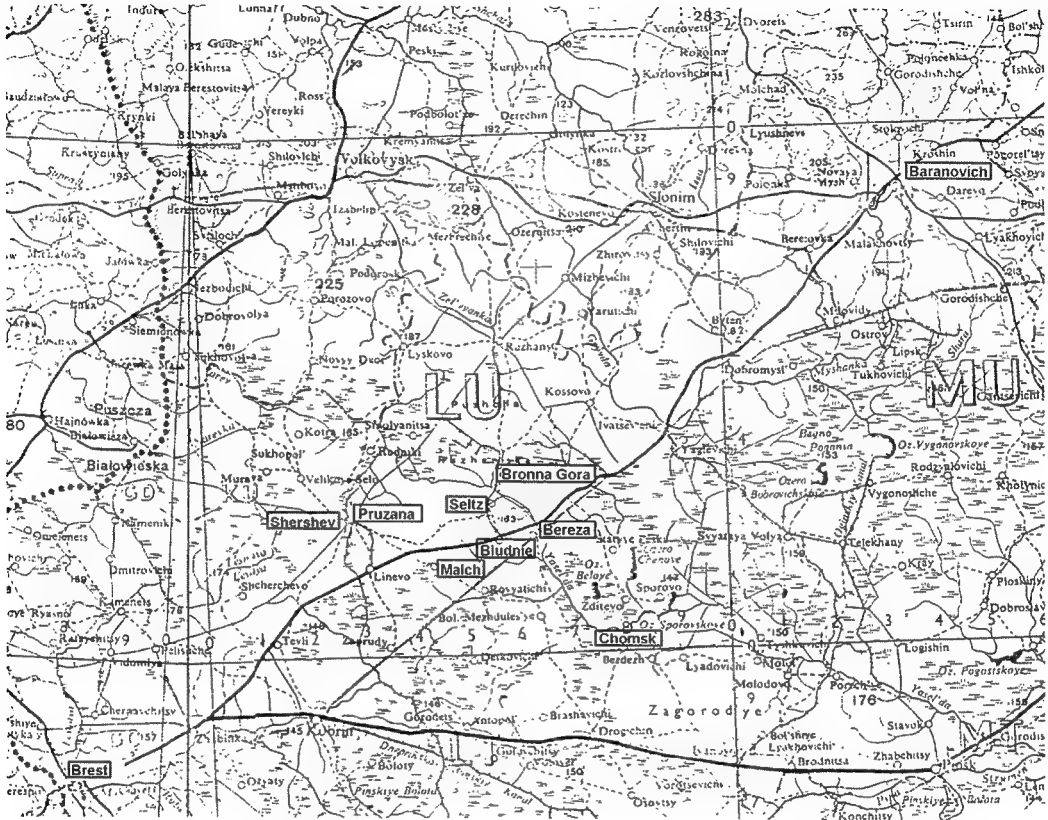
From the day of my arrival at the camp I was lucky. I knew that if I wrote to my parents and honestly described the camp the letter would not get past the censors. So when I wrote home, I told them that life in the camp was fine. However, I wrote that "I am living like Chayim Yankel, the shoemaker." Since Chayim Yankel was the poorest man in our village, my parents understood and sent me a large package of food every month. I had outsmarted the authorities in my own way. The package of food kept me healthy and able to work.

The superintendent of the carpentry brigade was a very kind man. He liked me and he kept my package of food in his residence so that it would not be stolen. Since everyone was so hungry, food was stolen all the time. The carpentry superintendent had been a general in the Tsar's Army before World War I, before Stalin took over. He was not like the Stalinists. When Stalin came to power he put 40,000,000 innocent people in jail and labor camps.

The food packages which I received from home had to be with me all the time. If I let them out of my sight they would be stolen. I had to carry the whole package with me when I went to work and hide it in the snow under a log. One day at lunch time I went to look for the package and it was gone. Someone had stolen it, but I knew that it had to be hidden somewhere, under another log. I told the story to my superintendent. He said, "Don't worry, I will find it." He took his dog to the place where I originally hid the food package. The dog sniffed under the log and started running and sniffing until he stopped at another log. He dug in the snow with his paws and dug out my package. I was very grateful to the superintendent and thanked him. I offered him some of my food but he didn't take any. From that day on, he stored my food package so that it would not be stolen. He was a very honest and kind man. I stopped receiving packages from home when the Germans attacked Russia and our town, Bereza Kartuzka, fell under German control on June 23, 1941.

# Chapter Eight: The Destruction of Berez'a

JUNE 1941 - OCTOBER 1942



**Map #7: Berez'a and Neighboring Towns**

On August 23, 1939, Nazi Germany and Communist Russia signed a non-aggression pact. They pledged not to attack each other and to divide Poland between them. On September 1, 1939, when Hitler's army crossed Poland's western border, the Soviet Army seized the eastern part of Poland. The dividing line between the Russian and German occupied zones was the River Bug. Berez'a, my home town, is sixty-two miles (100 km) east of Brest (Brest Litovsk), a city on the River Bug, so it fell under Soviet rule.

When the Soviet Union took over Berez'a they organized the people into cooperative factories for sewing and shoemaking. Many restrictive laws were passed. They confiscated the homes of rich Jews and sentenced some Jews to hard labor in Siberia. Ironically, the Jews from Berez'a who were sent to the Siberian labor camps were the ones who survived the war. Life was very difficult in Berez'a under the Soviets. There were shortages of food and clothing.

Hitler broke the non-aggression treaty and attacked the Soviet Army on Sunday morning, June 22, 1941. Since Bereza was close to the border between the German and Russian occupied zones it was one of the first towns to be captured by the Germans. At noontime they bombed the Russian Army camps in Bereza and the airport near Bereza in Ribik. The Jewish people in Bereza were in a panic. Some fled toward the Russian border. Those who crossed it safely may have survived the war. Those who did not escape were locked in ghettos by the Germans. They were all murdered.

(The information in the second part of this chapter was taken from *Pinkas Pruz'any - Pruzana and Its Vicinity: A Chronicle of Six Communities Which Perished in the Holocaust* .)

On June 22, 1941 Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union. The same day they bombed the airport near Bereza and then the army camps around the town. The Germans entered the town on Monday, June 23, 1941. The Christian population received the Germans as liberators. Many Jews fled the town, but after wandering in the fields, forests and villages, and receiving brutal treatment from the peasants who robbed and threatened them, many returned to the town. On June 25, 1941 the Germans set fire to the "Hevra Kadisha's" Synagogue which was on the corner of the market place. This synagogue was very close to our home which was on the opposite corner of the market place. They burned the houses on the nearby streets and didn't allow the inhabitants to save any of their property. The Germans set up a Jewish police force and a "Judenrat" (committee of Jews) to execute the orders of the German authority. These orders included supplying the Germans with Jewish workers from age 15 to 50 and fulfilling the German demands for payments. The Jews were forced to make contributions of gold, jewelry and other valuables. The Jewish police had to enforce the German orders. The Germans formed a ghetto behind the main road, and no Jew was allowed to live on the main road. Everyone received a half pound (250 grams) of bread daily. All the Jewish inhabitants had to wear yellow patches, one on the chest and one on the back. They lined up for work every morning in rows in front of the German Command. Then the Germans selected work groups, and drove them off to work camps. The local Christians acted as superintendents of the work groups. Very often the workers returned from their work assignment beaten and injured. The Germans would beat the Jews mercilessly, claiming that the Jews were responsible for the war and saying that they should be destroyed. Often they were unable to make the payments which were imposed on them. Life became harder and more difficult for them day by day. There was no way out. If the non-Jewish inhabitants wished, they could have helped the Jews to hide and find shelter in the forests. But as long as they didn't suffer from the Germans, they watched the Jews' suffering and seemed to enjoy it. Some of the Jews had opportunities to escape from the ghetto into the forest, but they knew if they escaped, the Germans would take revenge on their families and friends. So they were tied to the destiny of all the Jews in the ghetto.

A group of S.S. commanders went around to other Jewish towns in the area and killed the Jewish inhabitants. When the Germans arrived in Chomsk, not far from Bereza, the commanders killed almost all the Jewish residents living there and in the surrounding villages. Jews from Malch, Bludnie and Seltz were moved to Bereza. The Germans rounded up Jews in the small villages to make the work of destruction easier.

One day the Germans divided the ghetto into two parts. Ghetto A included the Jews who were productive, who worked for the Germans, and the rich people who had succeeded in bribing the Germans. It was situated on Ulany Street. Ghetto B included the Jews who could not work, the elderly and the disabled, and those that could not find productive jobs. Both ghettos were surrounded with barbed wire and Jews could go out of the area only by permit and accompanied by a non-Jew. On July 15, 1942 the Germans surrounded Ghetto B and told the "Judenrat" (a committee of Jews who were assigned to carry out the Germans' orders) that they were going to send the Jews off to Bialistock for productive work.



The Germans went from home to home and pulled the Jews out into the street and marched them off to the railway station in Bludnie, five miles away. The old and the sick who couldn't walk were shot on the spot, including Rabbi Trop. He was a neighbor who lived near me and was a very old man. On the way a few Jews tried to escape but were shot by the Germans. The people were placed in wagon trains and taken to Bronna Gora, a town twelve miles (twenty km) away in the direction of Baranovich. There they were shot, standing by the ditches that had been dug for them. The Germans transported more than a hundred thousand Jews from the nearby towns and surrounding villages to Bronna Gora to be shot and buried in mass graves. Miraculously, two men from my town of Bereza survived; Yitzhak Ozlowski, Hannah Gitel Lieberman's son-in-law, and Elimelech Tuchman. They reported back to the people in the town of the murderous cruelty of the Nazis and told how they executed innocent people, Jewish children, the young and old. My sister had a baby boy named Leible, two and a half years old. He was shot without mercy.

After the destruction of the first ghetto, the Germans promised that they wouldn't harm the Jews in the second ghetto, who were productive and doing work for the Germans. But many young Jews did not believe them and fled to the forests, some going as far as Pruzana, which was in Prussia and controlled by Germany, about forty miles away. They were treated a little better in the Pruzana ghetto. When the Christian villagers saw the Jews in the forests, they robbed them and threatened their lives. Russian partisan gangs who hid in the forests also threatened and killed many Jews. So most of the Jews came back to the ghetto. One of the survivors told me that my brother Gershon was one of the men who had escaped to the forest for some time and then returned to the ghetto. Personally, I wouldn't have made that decision.

The Germans started to suspect that many Jews had connections with the partisans. The Germans went to the town of Chomsk, thirty miles from Bereza, and killed all the Jews there. One day they surrounded the saw mill where twenty-four Jews were working and arrested them. The next day they shot them in front of the church wall. This became a heroic incident among the Jews of Bereza, because Lazer Berman, an electrician and friend of mine, was working in the saw mill. He set the saw mill on fire, and when the Germans tried to capture him, he wrestled the rifle from his German pursuer, shot and killed him. Lazer was also killed, but he was considered a hero for his resistance.

On October 15, 1942, the remaining ghetto in Bereza was surrounded by the Nazis and the police. The Jews realized their last hour had come. Some collected all their valuable possessions and brought them to the house of the tailor, Abraham Greenberg. They set the house, their belongings and themselves on fire. The blaze spread to other homes in the ghetto. The members of the Judenrat gathered at the home of Eliyahu-Moshe Epstein and hanged themselves. Some Jews prepared an underground tunnel from Ulan Street in the ghetto to Pruzana Street in the Christian side of town and tried to escape through it. Later, the peasants found 180 bodies. They were all choked or burned to death, but no one knew how this occurred. A few survived; they are in Israel now. Most of the survivors fled to the forest but they were murdered by the partisan groups and by the Germans.

The next day the Germans entered the ghetto, rounded up all the Jews who were still alive, put them on trucks and took them about five miles north of town. Here, near the forest called Smolarky, where the school children would go to celebrate the holiday of Lag Baomer, the Germans lined them up in front of the ditches that had been prepared for them and shot them all. They left seven Jews in the ghetto alive and working, but a week later they killed them also.



Later, at the end of 1943, the Germans dug up the bodies and burned them. The Russians surrounded the spot with barbed wire and pointed out that there was a mass grave on the site. The place where 1,800 Jews of Ghetto A were killed became overgrown with weeds. There was no fence or inscription. The Jewish cemetery was destroyed. The gravestones were uprooted and used as steps in the streets of the Christians. There is no longer any sign of Jewish life in Bereza.

## Chapter Nine:

# The Russian Labor Camp

**FEBRUARY 1941 - SPRING 1942**

I learned all this information much later. At that time I only knew that the food packages stopped arriving at the labor camp in Archangelsk and the struggle for survival became even more difficult.

Every prisoner who survived the hungry, bitter days and freezing nights had to walk four miles (six km) through the high snow to get to work. If someone fell from weakness or couldn't walk, the guards kicked him out of the line, into the snow. He was left to freeze to death.

There was a hospital in the camp. The stench of frozen limbs, hands, noses, and faces could be smelled from far away. People used to cry for help but there was no help. I saw people searching through the garbage that the guards threw out, hoping to find a morsel of food. If a guard caught anyone scavenging, he would be mercilessly beaten on the spot, often so badly that the scavenger was unable to walk away. It hurt me to see this but there was nothing I could do. A human being meant nothing to the Stalinist regime- all that mattered was their theoretical ideology. Innocent people were starving from hunger and freezing to death, but no one cared. They had a slogan, "When you drop dead we will bury you."

Some people worked with the horses to drag the wooden logs out of the forest. They received oats to feed the horses. They stole the oats from the horses and ate the oats themselves or even sold the oats for cigarettes. Even the horses were starved, abused, and too weak to work.

The people who were starving knew that they would die soon. We all saw that when a person's face, hands, or feet swelled up and his whole body was out of control, that he would die in only a few days. These people knew that their end was near, but they couldn't help themselves. The Russians drove them to work until they dropped. Those were Stalin's orders.

When I arrived at the camp I was assigned to work in the forest with the Tartars (an Asian people who live in Mongolia) cutting down the trees and digging out the roots. Then we had to roll the trees out of the forest and load them up onto the Pullmans. Loading the logs was the hardest and most dangerous job. Each log was about thirty feet long, wet, and very heavy. We had to roll them up on braces to the top of the Pullman. I remember feeling all of my strength dissipating then. I worked very hard at this job for a few weeks, but all the while I hoped that I could get out of this work. One morning when we were waiting to go out to the forest, I heard somebody yelling loudly, "Who is a carpenter?" I put my name on the list and from then on my lot improved. I was lucky. I had a better job.

There were twenty-four carpenters in our brigade. We started work later and labored separately from the thousands of others who worked in the forests. It took more than an hour to bring all the prisoners out of the barracks and line them up at the gate to leave for the forest. Everyone had to stand and wait, freezing in the cold until all the prisoners came out. Our group did not have to wait for an hour and suffer in the cold. It took only a few minutes for us to line up so we didn't have to freeze needlessly. The work we had to accomplish was not as hard as the work in the forest. We built log rafts on the shore, then pushed them into the water. The logs were carried down the river as rafts. The River Onega never froze because it was so swift.

We built the rafts from the logs which were chopped down by the other prisoners. We cleaned away the small branches and knots with an axe so that the logs would fit together tightly. The axes were also used to dig grooves in the logs. Then we drove wedges into the grooves to hold the logs together as rafts, so they wouldn't fall apart in the river.

Once when I was pushing a raft into the river, I slipped and fell into the cold, fast-running water. I was afraid that I would drown or freeze to death. Luckily I saw a log moving in the water. I grabbed onto it and pulled myself up onto the raft. Quickly I got out of the river, made a fire from wood lying on the ground, and dried myself, my shoes and my clothing. When I was warm and dry I went back to work.

One morning it was extremely cold and freezing. I started to chop at the knots to make the logs smooth, straight and even. As soon as I hit the frozen log with my axe, it bounced back off the log and hit my foot. It was a bad cut and they took me to the hospital to get a few stitches. I didn't go to work for seven days. I was glad that it happened, because I rested in the barracks for a week!

My superintendent, who was an engineer and in charge of all the construction, often watched me while I was working. I was not aware of this. Once he came over to me and said, "Harry, I never saw a Jew work as hard as you do." Then he asked me where I came from. I told him that I came from Belarussia, White Russia, and that all the Jews there were hard working people. He thought that Jews were only business people and never did any physical work. He told me that all the work that was assigned to me was always done correctly, and that I was the best man in the brigade. He and I became good friends.

There was another Jewish man working in that brigade. He came from Odessa in the Besarabia section of Rumania. He was a Communist and thought that he would be happier living in the Soviet Union which was a Communist country. In 1932 he escaped from Rumania and went to the Soviet Union. He joined the Communist Party there and was a teacher. In 1937 Stalin made a "cleaning of his mistrusted" and put 40,000,000 people in jails and labor camps. They were innocent and honest people but Stalin did not trust them. Among them was that Jewish man. One night in 1937, they came to his home and took him to jail. He was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor in Archangelsk Forest, which is where I met him. He never did anything wrong to anyone.

Most of the prisoners in that camp were just like him. They were innocent people who were arrested in 1937 and sentenced to hard labor in a bitterly cold region, where there was very little chance that they would live. Even though some prisoners managed to survive the years in the camp, they still did not know what their fate would be at the end of their slavery. They were all accused of anti-Communist activities under Paragraph #64.

I spoke with that man and told him to just look around and see what Stalin was doing. He put 40 million innocent men in hard labor camps to die from starvation. Most of the prisoners wouldn't survive. I told him, "You are an innocent man who believed in Communist ideas and so are many of the others." He told me that the Communist Party knew what it was doing because even in a thousand innocent prisoners they would find one or two people who were guilty. It was worth it to arrest the thousand in order to isolate the two guilty ones. Therefore, he believed it was justifiable to sentence millions of innocent people to forced labor camps. I told him that I totally disagreed with him and that no ideology could justify this brutal treatment of innocent human beings. He proceeded to tell me that the Communist Party would live through this. I told him that he was a fool and that his party was foolish and murderous. It is inhumane to force guiltless people to do hard labor while they are freezing and starving to death.

The summers there were very short, providing only about two months of warmth. Because we were so far north the summer nights were bright, almost like a cloudy day. We were dirty like pigs, never able to take off our clothing due to the severe cold. We were loaded with lice and there were cockroaches everywhere. Once in a while we were taken out to the field for a shower and our underwear was put in a stream. This procedure did not kill the lice.

The food situation got worse and worse. After 1941 I didn't receive any more mail or food packages from my family. Germany had taken over Poland in 1941 and there was no more communication between Poland and Russia after that. I started to get weaker and weaker. Luckily, General Sikorski, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces for the Polish Government in exile, met with Stalin in Moscow on December 5, 1941. He worked out an amnesty to free all Polish prisoners who were being held in Russian jails and labor camps.

I jumped for joy as high as the sky when I heard about the amnesty, but I was still unwilling to believe that the good news was true until I was free. Finally, an order came setting free the first 500 Polish prisoners. Since this was done in alphabetical order my name didn't come up in the first group. The second order came through and my name still didn't appear. I was getting weaker but my strong will kept me together. I thought I was close to dying because I had the terrifying symptoms which accompany starvation and death. My face, hands and feet were swollen and I could hardly walk. They didn't let me go to a doctor. They told me, "Don't worry, if you die we will bury you." I was struggling with life and death. I knew that if I could just survive for a few more days I would be able to leave as a free man.

My wish came true. One day in the spring of 1942, I heard my name called out on the list for release to freedom. I felt better right away. It was as if I had received a spiritual uplifting of my soul and a sudden renewal of energy to go on. We were called to the office and told that we were free to leave the camp. We were given a choice of two places in which to settle, Tambov or Tashkent. I chose Tambov (see Map #6) because it was 250 miles (400 km) from Moscow. Tashkent was very far away in the Asian part of Russia.

The same day they took us on the back of a truck out to a field to take a shower. While I was showering with hot water I became dizzy and felt as though everything around me was going in circles. Suddenly I fell down. While I was on the floor, unable to get up I was silently talking to myself, "HARRY, DON'T GIVE UP. YOU ARE FREE NOW. FREE TO LIVE." Luckily someone dropped a pail of cold water on me and I revived. I began to feel my strength coming back. I got up from the floor, dried myself off and got dressed to join the whole group in the barracks. The spirit of becoming a free man again revived me and kept me alive.

They gave us some dried food for the journey. Then the guards walked us the seven and a half miles (twelve km) to the railroad station in Archangelsk. Some of the guards walked in front of us and some walked behind. I was afraid they would make us turn somewhere and march us into another labor camp or jail. I kept looking back to watch the guards to see what they were doing. Despite the fact that my hands and feet were very weak and my face was swollen, my renewed spirit helped me to keep up with the group. Finally, we came to the station, and got on the train to Tambov. When I didn't see the guards any more, I knew that we were free again. On the train I realized for the second time that I was free. I had been in Soviet jails for nine months and at the Archangelsk Labor Camp for over a year. I thought to myself, "IT'S GOOD TO BE FREE." It was difficult for me to believe that I was free. It was like a miracle.

# **Chapter Ten:**

## **The Flour Mill in Tambov**

**SPRING 1942 - SPRING 1943**

It took us a few days to get to Tambov (See Map #6). On the way I looked out the train window and saw big piles of rye or wheat, stacked up high and rotting in the fields. I asked the other passengers why the crops were left to rot. I was told that the farmers harvested it in the summer but they never brought it into the barn for storage because the collective organization neglected to take care of it. While millions of people were going hungry looking for a piece of bread, grain was left out in the fields to rot. Bread was strictly rationed to everyone. Even the farmers in the collective that raised the grain only received a small ration of bread. That was the system that Stalin forced upon Russia. The produce was rotting in the fields, the people were starving, and over forty million people were in jail or labor camps.

The train stopped at every station. Hot water for tea and food was sold at every stop. If we had had money with us we could have bought some things to eat just as free people did, but we had to stay in line.

We had to travel on the train for several days. The trip took much longer than usual, because the railroad line was jammed with displaced people who were fleeing from the west where Hitler was pushing everyone deeper into Russia. All of the train stations were crowded with refugees.

Finally we arrived in Tambov and were directed to the Deportation Center. There we received food and were able to rest, although it was so crowded that everyone had to sleep on the floor. People remained there until they got a job, then they went on their way. They sent me to work in a "kolchoz" (a collective farm run by the Communist Party). I made the twenty-five mile (forty km) trip by train. As soon as I arrived I asked the people whether there was enough food for everyone. They told me that everything was rationed and there was not enough food. I turned around immediately, got back on the same train, and returned to the Deportation Center in Tambov.

I realized then that I would have to look around for a job myself. That job would have to provide me with both sleeping quarters and food because most places wouldn't hire you unless you already had a room. In Tambov, I found a job in a mill where they made flour for bread. Mills usually provided sleeping quarters for the workers and there was also a kitchen which the workers were allowed to use. This mill had two big sleeping rooms, one for the women and one for the men. The place where the men slept was a five minute walk from the mill.

My job was to fill bags with 172 pounds (85 kilograms) of flour. My work station was near the bottom of the tank where the milled flour was kept. I had to fill each bag with flour from the tank. First I tied an empty bag onto the spout at the bottom of the tank, then I opened the lever of the tank and let the flour pour into the bag. Then I shut off the tank, untied the bag from the spout and lifted the bag onto a scale. If the bag did not weigh exactly 172 pounds, I had to add or remove some flour. Once the bag contained the correct amount of flour I had to take it off the scale and place it off to the side where the girls stitched up the bags for transportation. That meant that I lifted each bag twice.

I produced six hundred full bags in eight hours work, every day, six days a week. On Sundays the mill was closed. It was very hard on me, and the director demanded more and more from me. There were two Russian men doing the same work that I did, but they were not expected to work as hard or produce as much as I was.

One morning I came to work and the guard at the entrance wouldn't let me enter the mill. The guard said that the Director had ordered him to take me to his office. I went there and spoke with the Director. He was an anti-Semitic Ukrainian, who belonged to the Communist Party. He knew that I was Jewish because in Russia, when you apply for a job, you have to tell them your nationality and faith. He told me that I was not producing enough on the job. He said that six hundred bags in an eight-hour day was insufficient. I told him that I was producing more than the other two workers who had been on that same job for twenty years! He said, "Don't look at them. You are supposed to produce more." I showed him my hands, which were swollen and painful, from handling the six hundred bags each day. He said, "That's nothing. You have to produce more." I told him that I was unable to do more. He accused me of refusing to work and didn't let me back on the job. I said, "Okay, if you don't let me go back to my job, it is your responsibility, not mine." In Russia there was a law that if a person refused to work, it was a CRIME, punishable by ten years in jail.

I went home and didn't work that day. The next day the guard came to me and said that the Director wanted me to come back to work. The flour tank was all clogged up and there was no production. The Director was afraid that he might go to jail because he had stopped me from working. I said, "I'm not going back to that same job where I was accused of not producing enough filled bags. I have swollen fingers from handling the bags. If I don't fit the job I'll take another job, such as loading the bags onto the Pullmans."

I didn't work for two days, then the Director called me back into his office and gave me the job that I wanted, loading the bags onto the Pullman cars. I thought that the loading job would be better for me because it would not be so rough on my fingers. Also, it was an outside job and I did not like breathing all the dust in the mill. I knew that the loading job would require me to use my back and shoulders and I felt that I could handle that. The Director made only one stipulation, which I accepted. I must help out the people who replaced me at the tank. The Ukrainian Director saw his mistake. He saw that he was responsible for the mill's production stoppage and that was why he agreed to my demand.

In the beginning, my new job was killing me, but after a few weeks I got used to carrying those heavy bags on my back to the Pullmans. I was satisfied with what I had done. One day a detective from the N.K.V.D. (pronounced the N Ka Voo Day - the secret political police), arrived and told me that I had to go to the N.K.V.D. office. He gave me the names of the people to see and the time of my appointment.

I showed up at their office on the designated day. They interrogated me and told me that they had been watching me. They knew that I had just come back from the labor camp at Archangelsk almost naked, without anything, and now, in a very short time, I was wearing new clothes and eating good food. They said that it was not possible for me to live so comfortably on the money that I received from my job. Therefore, they figured that I must be a spy for some capitalistic country. I told them that in addition to the wages I got every two weeks, I also loaded some flour for local bakeries. For this extra work, I received such products as bread, sugar, salt and sometimes vodka. I sold these products on the market, because I did not use them, and they commanded a lot of money. With the money I received, I was able to buy new clothes and food items which were more in keeping with my lifestyle. This approach was not like that of the other workers who would consume all of the food items and get drunk. I used to sell a

bottle of vodka for 800 rubles, which was almost three months wages. Bread, salt and sugar were hard to get, so they were also very valuable. They listened to my explanation, seemed satisfied, and sent me back to work.

While on the job, I met a nice, beautiful girl, Anna Nicolaievna. She was working in the mill as a security guard. We were attracted to each other. I used to meet her every day. She lived alone in a tiny one-room apartment that was so small it was hard to move around. I lived in the shared-living quarters with the other men who worked at the mill.

After a while she asked me to move in with her and enjoy life together. I liked her idea and moved in with her, even though the apartment was very tight. The room was very crowded with a bed, a small table, an oven and a sink, but it was lovely to be together. We got along very nicely with the other tenants. We worked six days a week, but on Sundays we went out to shows, concerts, or dancing and had a wonderful time.

Her parents, brothers and sisters lived 25 miles (forty km) away in Platanovka, a village in the country. From time to time, they came to visit us and we enjoyed being together with them.

One day I was called to the N.K.V.D. office again. I arrived in the assigned room on time and was greeted nicely by a man who was seated at a table. He offered me a cigarette. I thanked him kindly but told him that I did not smoke. He explained that there were all kinds of Russian and Polish workers at the mill. He suggested that I put up an ear to what they were saying and secretly report their conversations to him at the N.K.V.D. In other words, he wanted me to become an informer. I told him categorically, "NO, I do not want to get involved with anything like that." He made me an offer. I would be allowed to steal flour from the mill and sell it on the market. I told them that I didn't want that either. When he saw that I would not cooperate with him, he told me to go back to work and think about his offer.

The next week he called me again and wanted me to become a spy and inform on the other workers at the mill. I refused again, as I did on each of the five subsequent times that he asked me. On the last occasion the N.K.V.D. man became very angry with me. He stood up, took out a gun, and told me to get up and walk to the basement. He walked right behind me. When we got down to the basement, he put me up against the wall, placed the gun behind my right ear and, in anger, asked me again, "Will you sign up or not?" I said, "No." Then he said, "I'll shoot if you don't sign." I said, "Then shoot."

Finally, he realized that I would not cooperate with the N.K.V.D. He told me to walk with him to his office and sign a paper which he had already prepared. I had to promise that I would never tell anyone that he had asked me to become an informer. If I ran into him anywhere I was to act as if I had never seen him before. I signed that paper and he let me out of the building. I was glad to be free again. They didn't bother me anymore. After a few weeks they made an offer to a Ukrainian, who was very crooked, unreliable and usually drunk. He stole flour from the mill and sold it for vodka, so an offer to steal would be very handy for him. Now he could steal bags of flour without any fear because the N.K.V.D. was on his side (or he was on theirs). They allowed him to steal so he was drunk every day. He used to steal the flour from the mill and give it to a Russian man to sell. He told the man if the police arrest you and ask you where you got the flour, tell them Harry, the Jew, gave it to you. The Ukrainian and the N.K.V.D. plotted to put me in jail and get rid of me.

In 1942, while I was working in the mill in Tambov, I was able to see just how the Soviet system worked. Army patrols would roam the city looking for men to conscript into the army. Whenever they

found a man in the street who was younger than fifty-five they grabbed him and sent him to the front lines. If the man was over the age of fifty-five he had to be working in some job. He did not have the right to be on the street. Life was very tense. People were afraid to talk to each other or to express their feelings. There was no way for people to express their discontent, or to discuss everyday problems openly, because the N.K.V.D. turned everyone into informers. People spied on their friends, even on their parents and their own children.

There were constant shortages of bread while at the same time piles of wheat rotted in the fields. No one gathered the wheat to make it into bread. I could not understand this system. No one cared. There was no privacy and everyone was corrupt, especially the N.K.V.D. They were the bosses and had all the comforts and luxuries, while the workers had nothing. Bread was very scarce in the market, but if you were able to pay a very high price you could buy all you wanted on the black market. The same was true for food and clothing. The stores were empty most of the time and when some shipments came in, people had to wait in line for hours to get it. In a few hours the store was empty again and the people at the end of the line went home angry and empty handed.

Most people, no matter where they worked or what they produced for the government, were forced to steal in order to survive. There was a slogan in Russia: "If you do not steal, you will not survive." The shortages and black market forced everyone to take things from their job. Stalin ordered that anyone caught stealing, even as little as a pound of grain, was to be sent to a labor camp in Siberia for ten years.

One night at two A.M., while we were asleep, we heard a knock at the door. My girlfriend Anna asked, "Who is there?" They answered, "The N.K.V.D. Open the door." My girlfriend opened the door. Two men walked in and started to look around the room. They even pulled up a floor board. They found nothing, of course. Anna had a small storage room in the back yard. The two men told her to show them her storage room and she took them there. They found one pound of flour and accused her of stealing it from the mill. They declared that I was under arrest. They said that a man had been caught selling stolen flour on the black market, and he said that I had given him the flour. The drunken Ukrainian who was an informer and the N.K.V.D. had worked together to frame me.

In actuality, the Ukrainian drunk from the mill stole the flour and gave it to his neighbor to sell. When the police arrested the man, he said that I gave it to him to sell. They arrested me and put me in jail so that I would not be able to reveal how they lie and spy on people. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian informer remained free. That was the way it was in Russia. Everyone was spying on each other. I could not accept such a system. It was not in my nature to be part of such corruption and deception.

My girlfriend Anna and I were put in jail. I saw right away that the N.K.V.D. and the informer plotted to get us arrested and imprisoned for ten years. My girlfriend was completely innocent. In order to protect her, I testified that I bought the pound of flour on the black market, but I actually knew nothing about the man and the flour he was selling. After my testimony they put me in jail and let Anna go home. I was glad that she was free. Why should she suffer? She was lovely. Every week that I was in jail, she brought me a package of food, with a few baked potatoes inside. In one potato she would secretly insert a little message. The messages said that a lawyer was helping us with my case. After five months they let me out. They didn't have enough evidence to bring me to court. I was free and happy to be home with my girlfriend.

We were happy together again, but not for very long. She received a letter calling her to the Russian Army. Her conscription was another shock for me. I was very upset when Germany invaded Poland and Russia. Hitler's armies were torturing people and murdering them in gas chambers. I knew that my



family, friends, and all the Jewish people that Hitler could reach were being tortured to death. It was painful for me to stay safely behind and do nothing to end the killing of innocent people. I volunteered to serve in the Russian Army to help fight Hitler. My desire was to see Hitler and his followers defeated and wiped out. I didn't care if I died in the struggle, as long as I had the satisfaction of knowing that I was fighting evil.

In a few days I had to leave my girlfriend. After I received my army enlistment papers she took me to the train. I'll always remember the moments of my departure. We embraced and she cried bitterly like a baby. I boarded the train and waved goodbye to her through the window. She was still crying. The next day she had to go to the army herself. We went in different directions, both of us to fight Hitler.

# Chapter Eleven: The Russian - Polish Army

**SPRING 1943 - MAY 1945**

I was sent to an Army Infantry training camp in Kuznieck. Even though I was trained and had artillery experience in Poland, they still put me with the infantry division at the front behind the town of Kirova, southwest of Moscow and east of Smolensk (see Map #8).

The fighting was ferocious at the front. The battlefield was littered with thousands of dead soldiers from both sides. After each battle the dead were cleaned up and replaced by others from the reserves.

Near Kirova the fighting was intense. The Russian Army was determined to chase the Germans out, no matter how many casualties they suffered, while the Germans were stubborn and tried to hold on to the area. The section changed hands several times, with many casualties on both sides.



**Map #8:** Route taken by Polish and Russian Armies in pursuit of the German Army, 1943-1945.

I paid a price in that fight. In July 1943, while we were retreating I was wounded in the thigh and fell to the ground, bleeding. Our company retreated and had no chance to carry me with them. The German Infantry advanced and went right past me. I lay face down with blood all over me from the wound, pretending that I was dead. Some of the German soldiers kicked me to see if I was alive. But I tricked them and they left me lying there. Luckily, within twenty minutes our Russian Army drove the Germans back. They were forced out of the area leaving many casualties on the field, including "make-believe dead" Harry. The Russian first aid brigade picked me up, attended to my wound and sent me to the hospital.

They took good care of me there. After a few weeks they sent me back to the army training camp in Kuznieck for recuperation. There, I prepared myself for another call to the front line and another chance to face the Germans in battle again. While at Kuznieck I was assigned to instruct the new recruits in rifle use and fighting tactics.

At the end of September, 1943, after a few months in the training camp as an instructor, I was reassigned to the front. At that time the Polish Army began organizing in Russia under Vanda Vasilevska to fight alongside the Russian Army. I was asked to join the Polish Army. I agreed and was transported to their headquarters. When I arrived at the train station in Divovo I saw transports of young Polish Jews ready to depart. I asked them what it was all about. They said that they had come all the way from Tashkent, volunteering to join the Polish Army to fight Hitler. But they had been told that the First Division was completely filled and that they might have a chance to join the Second Division three months later after the First Division was trained and fighting on the front. They all returned home. I went to the headquarters with my referral from the Russian Army. They looked it over and gave me an application to sign up as a volunteer. I was assigned to a 120 mm Mortar Battery company in the artillery. The company was supposed to be in disposition to the Second Regiment Infantry, which was a part of the First Division. The First Division was organized in the woods in Divovo, a small province 250 miles (400 km) from Moscow. We dug out trenches in the ground for sleeping quarters.

After a few weeks of training with the mortars, I was assigned to a higher school of training to become an officer/ instructor for the Second Division which would be organized in three months. Every day we had training lessons with the mortars. One time while we were training in the woods I felt a shiver in my body, hot and cold flashes, and I lost control of myself. I went to the medical center and they said that I had contracted malaria. They gave me quinine and I got well. I had to take two tablets every day.

In artillery school we were taught how to handle the 120 mm mortars which can shoot over mountains for a distance of four miles (six km). 120 mm refers to the size of the opening of the gun barrel (about five inches). The weight of the load varies from 40-100 pounds and when it lands, it breaks up into tiny pieces which spread over an area of 600 feet, killing or wounding everything in its path.

In 1943 when I was in the Polish-Russian Army, every soldier was given a document to sign, stating that the Soviet Government, particularly Stalin's Secret Police, didn't shoot the 4,400 Polish officers in the Katyn Forest, near Smolensk in Belarussia. Another 10,600 officers were shot to death in 1940 and were buried elsewhere in the former Soviet Republic of Belarussia. In 1990, Moscow officially admitted that the massacre took place, but the Kremlin insisted the Nazis were to blame. I don't believe there were any Jews among those Polish officers, because the Polish government would not allow Jews to become officers in the army.

After three months, in December 1943, everyone was promoted and received diplomas. I became a sergeant and went back to my company in the First Division. In a few weeks the whole First Division went

to the front to fight beside the Russian Army near Smolensk. I was left in camp. My orders were to train the soldiers in the Second Division. I was assigned to the 120 mm Mortar Battery in disposition of the 4th Infantry Regiment. Our job was to follow the Infantry and protect them by firing over them onto the German Infantry. I met my Captain, Vasil Karasov, a wonderful man, who was very good to me. There were three lieutenants in the unit also. One lieutenant, a political appointee, was female. I was appointed the top sergeant and assigned to take care of the company. There were seventy-five soldiers, eight mortars and four Studebaker trucks which we used to carry the ammunition and to haul the mortars to the front. My captain and one lieutenant were Russian, the female political lieutenant was Polish and the other lieutenant was Ukrainian.

When the new soldiers arrived in the Second Division, the Captain and I went and picked out seventy strong men. Among them were eight Jews. Next to us were two more artillery batteries, the 75 mm and the 82nd. The three batteries together created a battalion. Every battery had five Russian officers but they didn't know how to speak or give commands in Polish. Since I had been a soldier in the Polish Army before the war from 1937-38, I knew how to give commands in Polish.

The Captain asked me to do the training in the woods so that no one would see us. The troops lined up in front of me and I instructed them in the commands until they performed them correctly. My Captain, Vasil Karasov, was a very nice man and came from Mohilov, Russia. I got along with him very well. He was like a father to the battery soldiers and I was supposed to be like a mother and take care of everything: the soldiers, trucks, mortars, ammunition, field kitchen and food. The two lieutenants and I trained the soldiers out in the field. I treated everybody nicely and so did the Russian lieutenant. The Ukrainian lieutenant tried to take advantage of some of the weaker Jewish soldiers and make a joke out of them. When I saw that, I told him that I would report him to the Captain if he continued belittling the Jewish soldiers. He stopped his sadistic pleasure.

Every morning, for three months, we lined up the soldiers outside the bunkers and had them do fifteen minutes of exercise. Then they had to run a half mile to the river, wash up and run back. After that I lined them up to go to the kitchen for breakfast.

There was one hour rest and then training started for the day. We trained six days a week; Sunday was a holiday. If someone wanted to go out I gave him a permit. Once a day I lined up the battery, inspected everyone and reported to the Captain. He talked to them and gave them some instructions.

Although we were separated, my girlfriend and I corresponded by mail. She wanted to be transported to my battery and be with me but that was impossible. You can't tell the army what to do and how to operate. Unfortunately she was stationed far away from me, on the front. From the end of 1942 until the end of the war in May, 1945 we were separated, but we kept in communication.

After three months of training we set out for the front to fight near Smolensk. It was cold and there was a lot of snow on the ground. We stopped behind Smolensk. The infantry regiment traveled about five miles (eight km) off the main road. Because we had trucks and heavy ammunition we could not leave the road. We stopped in a village on the route. We had our field kitchen with us but I had to get the food from headquarters which was five miles (eight km) away from the main road and through deep snow.

I took an automatic rifle and two hand grenades and went on foot in the snow to the headquarters to get our food. I reported to the head commander and told him that I needed transportation to bring the food back to my battery. He gave me a sled and two small, white, short-legged horses for transportation.

I loaded a week's supply of food onto the sled and headed back to my quarters. When I left, the snow was three to four feet deep and piling up. It was so high that the horses got stuck in it and couldn't move. They were having a very difficult time. I relieved them and pushed the sled myself for a little while and then the horses were able to pull it again. I worked with the horses like that for hours, trying to pull the sled through the deep snow. I was crying for help like a baby, but there was no one there to help me. I was afraid of getting stuck and freezing to death, or even worse, getting caught by the Germans, who were only a few kilometers away. I was all alone but I tried with all my strength to get my horses out of there.

All of a sudden while I was on the other side of the sled I saw a German soldier on skis coming toward me. When I saw him, he was already very close, and he was reaching for his automatic rifle. I was ahead of him and I shot him with a round from my automatic rifle. He fell instantly. I looked around to see whether there were more German soldiers nearby. Luckily he was alone. I took his rifle and a few of his hand grenades and I continued to struggle to my quarters where my company and the Captain were waiting for me.

I arrived home in the evening. It took me six hours to make the five mile (eight km) trek with the sled and two horses. When I saw the Captain he was very worried. He thought I had been shot by the Germans. When I told him what had happened and gave him the German rifle he cheered up. He was glad that I came back alive and had brought food for a whole week.

We stayed in that village for a few weeks and had several clashes with the Germans. Most of the soldiers were quartered in houses in the town. Because our soldiers were scattered all around the village, I spoke with my Captain about conducting a practice drill. We needed to determine how quickly the soldiers would respond and be ready for action, in case of a sudden attack from the German Army. I blew the horn for an alarm, and we waited near the mortars to see how fast the soldiers would respond. By rights, they should be ready in three minutes, but it took more than ten minutes. We were very disappointed. In case of a real attack from the Germans we would be wiped out. The Captain was very angry and gave the soldiers a very rough speech. Then he asked me to take care of them and give them the right training. While they were lined up I explained to them why we had to be ready in only a few minutes. I told them that we were going to have some very rough infantry training to be able to face all kinds of enemy attacks from tanks, airplane bombers and infantry. This involved running, falling, crawling, getting up and falling again. I gave them that kind of training for two hours and they were really sweating. I lined them up again and explained that this type of training shouldn't have to be repeated if they responded to the alarm horn in good time. They listened and they did as I asked. After this training, whenever we were attacked by the Germans they were on time. It was a good experience and a good lesson for all of us.

I also had to see to it that none of the soldiers got drunk; I warned them many times of the dangers of getting drunk. Everyone had to be able to face the Germans when we were called to attack. Once a Ukrainian, a bully, got drunk and came to our headquarters, where the Captain and I were lodging. He cursed the Captain and called him all kinds of filthy names. I was ashamed of myself for what I heard coming from his mouth. I couldn't control myself, I punched him in the face a few times. I kicked him into the stable that was connected to the house. He stayed there with the cow for five days. After he was let out, I never saw him drunk again and he behaved himself with respect to everyone.

After a few weeks in Smolensk we moved forward and stopped in a village seven and a half miles (12 km) from Berdichev, in the Ukraine. As usual I questioned the people of the village. The Captain, the woman lieutenant and I worked very closely together in our headquarters and in the field kitchen. We

stayed in a house which was owned by a woman. She had a three-year-old girl. Her husband was in the army and was wounded at the front. He was in the hospital in Kiev, but she never visited him. She was very nice to us, especially to me. She made vodka from white beets, which she sometimes shared with me, but we did not get drunk.

One day the Captain and one of the drivers took a truck and went to Berdichev City which was about seven and a half miles (12 km) away. In Berdichev the Captain tried to drive the truck, which he was not authorized to do. Only the drivers were allowed to drive the trucks. The Captain drove the truck into a brick wall and badly damaged it. He went to an army garage to get it fixed. He did not want to report it to headquarters and risk an investigation into the accident. The garage refused to touch it unless he gave them three quarts of vodka. The Captain was in big trouble and he knew that he could be severely punished. He sent a sergeant to ask me to get him the vodka to bail him out of his dilemma. I didn't have any but I knew that the woman from the village did. I spoke with her and we made a deal. She gave me the vodka in exchange for soap, because soap was also hard to get. I sent the vodka to the Captain. They fixed the truck for him and he returned to our headquarters a happy man. He greatly appreciated the favor I had done in obtaining the vodka for him.

After a few weeks we had to move on to Kivertsy, a Ukrainian town a few hundred miles away. Before we left, the whole village gathered around our headquarters to say goodbye. I thanked the landlady for all the hospitality she had given to me and to the other soldiers. She embraced me and kissed me. She wanted me to promise to write to her from the front. All the people from the village were standing around and watching. They were stunned and surprised. Her husband was the head of the village, like a sheriff. He was lying wounded in a hospital bed in Kiev and here she had fallen in love with me. I felt very uncomfortable.

Before we left the village, I went to the main headquarters and got ten days worth of food for the whole battery. The head of the Army Politburo, a mayor, was traveling with our battery. He was assigned to us because he had no other transportation and we had trucks. He demanded that I give him extra food and prepare it specially for him. His demand meant that I would have to steal food for him from the soldiers. I didn't have the right to do this so I didn't give him any extra food. I told him that the cook prepared the food in the kitchen for everyone and he was welcome to join us. He would be treated just like everyone else.

On one occasion we stopped to rest for the night and we needed water for the kitchen to make supper. The only water I could get was not far away, but was in an open area which the Germans had under observation. It would be very risky to get the water because German snipers were posted near the area. I spoke with my Captain about this. I said it wasn't worth the risk to get the water. We decided to give the soldiers dry food from the reserve. Everyone got dry food, including the mayor from the Politburo!

It took us less than ten days to arrive at Kivertsy in the Ukraine. We took our position in the woods which were surrounded by mosquito-infested swamps. On the first day a gendarme military policeman came over to me and took me to the office of the head of the military intelligence. The mayor of the Politburo was there. He was very angry and told me that he was going to arrest me and send me to Siberia. This was because I had not fed the soldiers supper in such and such a place. I explained that the water was in an open area that was controlled by German snipers. I told him that Captain Karasov had decided not to risk losing any lives getting the water, so we served dry food that night for supper.

For two hours he threatened me, saying that he had every intention of sending me to Siberia. Finally, the head of intelligence decided to soften his ruling. He told me to go back to my quarters and give his orderly a can of bacon and some sugar. This I did gratefully. All that had transpired was a result of the Russian Politburo official. He was angry that I hadn't stolen from the soldiers to feed him special meals. For his selfish sake he was ready to arrest me and send me to Siberia to join the rest of the forty million innocent people in the jails and hard labor camps dying from hunger and cold. That was the dictatorial Russian leadership. They didn't care for the people, only for themselves. My Captain was glad to see me return. He said that he wouldn't have been able to rescue me. The Communists are the bosses and whatever they say goes. They are always right and they do whatever they please. No one can contest a Politburo order.

As we were surrounded with lakes and swamps loaded with mosquitoes, I had a few attacks of malaria. I had to take two quinine tablets every day. I decided to give the same dosage to all the soldiers for prevention. This worked well. After that no one came down with malaria. In the meantime, I received a letter from our former landlady in Berdichev, the woman whose husband lay abandoned in a hospital bed while she showed such interest in me. I didn't like this idea so I didn't write back to her.

As we were fighting and chasing the Germans from the Ukraine territory, many partisans who were also fighting the Germans came out of the woods. Some joined us in the army. Among them were many young Jewish boys, about thirteen or fourteen years old. Our regiment headquarters assigned one of these young minors to our company, a boy by the name of Johnny. He was Jewish, but he denied it. While he was in the woods with the partisans he had to hide his identity from everyone, so he still had the fear. He was assigned to the Captain, almost like a son or a pet. I did not use him on the front lines whatsoever, even though he was very anxious to be on active duty. He would ask me if he could deliver food to the observation point a few miles away from our position, where the Captain and six soldiers were watching the movements of the German troops. These men were dug into trenches, right on the front line, not far from the enemy. I never let him do this because it was very dangerous; I treated him like a pet also. Once I said to him, "Johnny, you see we have eight Jews in our company, and I am Jewish." I asked him, "Are you Jewish?" He jumped up, furious and outrageously angry, and denied that he was a Jew. He said if he could, he would kill me, even though I had given him a gun for his protection. "Okay," I said, "whatever you say is all right. After all, everyone has the right to be what he wants." I knew he was Jewish because I had a soldier in my company who knew his family, but they were murdered by the Nazis.

After a few weeks in Kivertsy we fought our way forward toward the Polish cities of Lublin and Warsaw. On the way we had some very hard fighting and sustained some casualties. The Germans were retreating rapidly. We entered Lublin on July 24, 1944. There was heavy fighting but the Germans were again forced to retreat. About a mile and a quarter from Lublin was Majdanek, a labor/extermination camp. The huge compound was surrounded with double barbed wire fences which were electrified with high voltage. Our army entered the camp and liberated the inmates. Our soldiers found seven gas chambers and hundreds of unburied corpses lying in piles on the ground. However, we didn't stop there; our mission was to fight and chase the barbarous Germans to the end.

The Majdanek camp was built in 1940-1941 by Jewish prisoners of war who had previously been held in a camp in Lublin. Five thousand Russian POWs were first brought to the camp on July 21, 1941. Most of these Russian prisoners died of starvation, torture or exposure to the cold. Majdanek was a large camp. Its one hundred and forty-four barracks housed up to 45,000 prisoners. The camp was divided into five sections. The fifth part was eventually called the Death Camp. During its first year, Majdanek served as a labor camp for Jews and Polish political prisoners.

In 1942, the first Jews arrived from Slovakia and the Protectorate. They were followed by Jews from Holland, Belgium, France, and Greece. Then more Jews from Poland were brought to the camp. From 1942 to 1943 the camp contained 13,000 people.

The Soviet Commission of Inquiry found passports and other identifying documents belonging to people from all over Europe. The camp food, sanitation and living conditions in general were vile. Many of the inmates died of dysentery. The gas chambers operated on the same system that was employed at Auschwitz. The Germans executed many people with guns, and also used death vans, bus-like vehicles which were moving gas chambers. The S.S. men in Majdanek were particularly sadistic and tortured people for their own pleasure. They were especially fond of slaughtering infants and children before their mothers' eyes. During roll calls, which were held every morning and evening (as in all the camps), the inmates were harassed with particular zeal. Typically, one of the prisoners was ordered to step forward and was informed that he had been condemned to death. The sentence was quickly carried out by hanging.

The transports, which carried Jews from outside Poland, were brought straight to the gas chambers. This procedure was similar to those followed in all concentration camps.

Adolph Eichmann visited Majdanek at the end of 1942. Before his arrival the inmates were forced to stand in parade formation for an entire day. According to the testimony of a witness at the Eichmann Trial, when he finally arrived, he gave a cursory glance at the inmates and said, "Get rid of the whole pile." He meant "pile of garbage."

The worst massacre occurred in the third camp on November 3, 1943 when 17,000 Jews were mowed down by machine gun fire in a single day. The few hundred remaining in Majdanek were put to work covering up the evidence of this atrocity. According to the official Polish estimate 200,000 people were killed in the camp. One hundred and twenty five thousand of the victims were Polish Jews who either survived the Warsaw uprising or came from nearby Bialystok.

In the summer of 1943, 10,000 Jews who were fit for labor were transferred out of Majdanek to Auschwitz and other concentration camps.

The Polish people of Lublin and the surrounding area were very anti-Semitic. I spoke with them and they repeated how angry they were that Hitler wasn't able to kill all the Jews. My heart was burning all the while I heard these conversations, but there was nothing I could do. We stayed in Lublin one day and moved forward toward Warsaw. We kept pushing the German Army and they retreated to Warsaw on the west side of the River Vistula. There, they held their position. We did not cross the River Vistula, but stopped on the east bank. In order to enter Warsaw we had to cross the River Vistula, the widest river in Poland.

On July 29, 1944 while we were in the city of Praga, on the east side of the river, the Polish people rebelled against the Germans in Warsaw. The Russian Army was not prepared to cross the river and did not send help to the Polish rebellion. General Zigmund Berling, the Polish Commander, who was supposed to get orders from Russian headquarters, acted on his own. He ordered the Polish division to cross the river in small boats. The infantry and light 45 mm caliber artillery, which could be carried by hand, were put on the boats, while we, the Polish artillery, fired across the river at the Germans.

At first the Germans didn't know what was happening. They thought the whole Russian Army was going on the offensive. They began to retreat, and some of the Polish Infantry landed on the other side



of the river while the rest of the soldiers were still crossing. The Germans saw that only the Polish units were involved in the attack, and knew that without the support of the Russian Army, the Polish units would be unable to hold their positions. The Germans turned back and destroyed the Polish units that had crossed the river. The Germans also called in aircraft and sunk the boats which were crossing the river. Our Polish commander, on the east side of the river, tried to help them, but unfortunately he wasn't successful because the Russian Commander, General Rokosovski, provided no support. The Polish general lost the battle. He was later removed from command by the Russian intelligence and called to Moscow. No one knew what happened to him after that.

The Polish rebellion was defeated by the Germans in September 1944. About 40,000 civilian rebels from the Polish National Guerrillas (*Armia Krajowa* or A.K.) were killed. The Russian Army tried to cross the River Vistula in September 1944 but failed. The pontoon bridges were destroyed by German bombers and the soldiers drowned. The Russian Army gave up building bridges and waited until the winter came, when the river would freeze and be easier to cross.

We dug trenches behind the Vistula around the neighborhood called Kowche in Praga. We exchanged artillery fire with the Germans every day and night. The bombs didn't stop falling on either side. Luckily we were protected in the trenches with just the nose of the mortars sticking out. We lost soldiers and a Russian lieutenant on the observation point. Warsaw was on fire every day from the artillery and bombers of both armies.

On January 17, 1945 we were told to prepare to cross the Vistula as part of a major offensive. The river was covered with a thick layer of ice, so our infantry and light artillery (120 mm mortars, 75 mm howitzers and 81 mm mortars) would be able to traverse the river. At 2:00 A.M. the Russian Katiusha rockets and all the artillery on the front, including our battery with its 120 mm mortars, opened fire on Warsaw. We bombarded the German positions for two hours, covering every square foot of the city. It was scary to watch. All Warsaw was ablaze and even the sky was fiery red as the bombs came from every direction. At the same time the Pontoon Battalion was busy erecting pontoon bridges to cross the river. The German aircraft kept bombarding them and destroying whatever they built. Many Russian soldiers drowned in the river while they were building the bridges. Finally Russian fighter planes chased away the German planes and the bridge was built on pontoon boats.

Following the two hours of artillery shelling, the entire Russian and Polish Armies crossed over the river. Our artillery battery with four trucks loaded with ammunition and eight mortars also crossed over. We didn't use the bridge, we crossed the river on the ice. We were almost the first to land. There wasn't a living soul on the other side, only burning buildings. All Warsaw was in flames. Hitler had ordered his soldiers not to surrender, so before they retreated they burned all the ammunition and food they had in the warehouses. They had no time to move it out.

In Warsaw we passed the place where the Jewish Ghetto had been. There was no trace of anything, just ashes. On April 19, 1943 the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto rose up against the Germans. During the weeks of their revolt they died by the thousands. The Germans then slaughtered the survivors.

In a few days of fighting we took thousands of German soldiers as war prisoners. We chased them on the way to Bidgosc. From Bidgosc we moved toward the German border and crossed the River Oder. The Russian and Polish artillery and Russian aircraft bombed the Germans on the west side of the Oder for several hours before we could cross the river on pontoon bridges and march to the River Nice. Both sides sustained heavy casualties but we were able to cross the river and continue to pursue the German Army westward toward Stettin, where German troops were heavily concentrated. This Polish city is

located on the River Oder where it flows into the Baltic Sea. Stettin is now part of Poland and is called Szczecin. The German Army surrounded the Polish Army, encircling us with their armored tanks, artillery, infantry and planes. We couldn't break through by ourselves because we didn't have enough ammunition and supplies were unable to get through to us. We held our position and kept the Germans away for two days until the nearby Russian Army attacked them and broke through the circle. We hit them from the inside, the Russians hit them from the outside, and we destroyed the whole German circle around us. They shot at us from the land and from ships in the Baltic Sea. They almost destroyed our infantry and the observation point at which our Captain and six soldiers were positioned. Luckily they were safe in the trenches they had dug.

The Polish infantry couldn't handle the German infantry and the bombardment. We were forced to retreat a mile and a half (2-3 km) back to where our artillery forces were positioned. The retreat left our Captain and six soldiers surrounded by the German infantry. Captain Karasov figured out that the only way to save himself and the six soldiers was to order us to fire on his position (the observation point). We did as he ordered and the German infantry was wiped out. Then the Captain and six soldiers came out of the trenches alive. Our infantry returned to the front line and participated in the heavy fighting there. Captain Karasov became a hero and later received a medal of honor for bravery. He really deserved it for calling fire down on himself while he was surrounded by the German infantry. His action destroyed a whole battalion of German infantry. On April 26, 1945, we defeated the Germans and chased them out of Stettin, toward Berlin, 64 miles away.

On the way to Berlin we liberated the Ravensbruck Labor and Concentration Camp, the only camp just for women. It was located near the town of Furstenberg, sixty miles (96 km) north of Berlin. The Ravensbruck archives stated that from 1939 to 1945 92,000 women were killed in its gas chambers.

We entered Ravensbruck on April 30th, 1945. As the Soviet Army drew near to Ravensbruck, the S.S. guards marched the 17,000 women who were able to walk westward away from the front. Along the way, most of the women were shot or died of exhaustion. Their bodies were found strewn along the road and nearby forest.

When we arrived, only 3,000 women remained in the camp. They were little more than walking skeletons, and too sick to march with the others. Their bodies were skin and bones. These women were scheduled to be gassed the same day we freed them, but the Germans had to cancel their plans and run because we were after them. The women told us that they woke up in the morning and saw no guards, so they walked out. My company had a field kitchen so I ordered the cook to prepare a cracked oat cereal. They were given plenty of hot tea with sugar as well.

I ordered our soldiers to take the women who could walk to the homes of the nearby German residents, take the Germans' best clothing, and give it to the women. They threw away their prisoner clothing and got dressed up very nice. Some of them couldn't stand on their feet, they were so weak and sick, but they were happy to be free. Some of them wanted to follow us but we weren't allowed to take them. The same day they were picked up and taken by trucks to a center for homeless refugees in Bidgosc City in Poland. I was glad to help them.

The same day, we continued chasing the German Army which kept fighting stubbornly. Our regiment had a specially trained squadron of soldiers that would operate at night. They would sneak in on the German positions and attack the soldiers who were dug into trenches. Their orders were to kill the guards without making any noise, then jump into the trenches where the Germans were sleeping and

throw hand grenades at the soldiers. Then they would return to our position, sometimes with prisoners. Hitler ordered his soldiers not to retreat and not to surrender, but a lot of them gave up and became war prisoners. They were forced to retreat and left numerous casualties on the battlefield. After a heavy battle, thousands of dead soldiers from both sides were left lying there. After several days, the odor could be detected for miles.

We continued chasing them but they fought back ferociously, bombarding our positions with their artillery and aircraft. We inflicted heavy casualties on the German Army but many men fell on our side too. One day we lost contact with our Captain who was on the observation point. The radio and telephone line had been cut off. Immediately I sent out soldiers to find the line and repair it. Meanwhile, from a distance I saw our Captain limping toward us. He was wounded in several places from artillery shrapnel. He pulled some pieces out by himself but he was unable to remove one that was stuck in his back. He asked me to cut it out with a razor blade. I sliced under his skin and removed it. Then I applied iodine and bandages to the wound. The Captain rested for only three days and then went back to the observation point, even though his wounds had not yet healed. He felt responsible for the men. He was a very brave man.

We were part of General Zhukov's army that was going to take Berlin. We fought the Germans very aggressively and proudly. We were determined to destroy the barbarous murderers and see Hitler dead. At least that was my only wish- to defeat them. Every step we made forward was a healing for me and all our soldiers. We saw Hitler's power coming to an end. We took in many thousands of German prisoners; they surrendered in whole battalions and regiments. They knew that it was the end of their barbarous, murderous dream.

When General Zhukov's army attacked Berlin we were a part of that force. The German Army in Berlin tried to hold on and kept resisting, but we surrounded them, encircling them with tanks, artillery, infantry, fighter planes and bombers. We strengthened our forces around Berlin and kept attacking the city day and night. Berlin was afire, every square foot was bombed and reduced to ashes. On May 2, 1945 we took the Reichstag (the German legislature). Berlin was finally in our hands. I was glad. We continued fighting on until we destroyed the entire German Army and Hitler committed suicide.

On May 8, 1945 we stopped at the River Elbe and met the American Army which had halted on the other bank. That day was a big triumph for us and the whole world. We were finished with the barbarous Hitler and his followers. We waved hello and sent good wishes to the American soldiers on the other side of the Elbe. Our units remained there another day and on May 10, 1945 we moved sixty-two miles (one hundred km) back from the river to the woods for a rest in our tents. Our position, along the River Elbe, was replaced by Russian tanks, heavy artillery and very heavy reinforcements. I think the Russians brought in these reinforcements because they were afraid that the Americans might change their mind, cross the Elbe and move forward on the Russian Army. But the American Army kept its word and met them in peace.

## Chapter Twelve: Post-War Poland

**MAY 1945 - JULY 1946**

After a month our units started to move back toward Poland. Our regiment was assigned to stay in Kielce (see Map #8), an anti-Semitic city. On the way from Germany to Poland we saw a lot of traffic while our trucks were on the road. The Russians didn't lose any time. They transported all the heavy industry, entire factories and anything they could take from Germany. The roads were jammed for miles and miles with trucks on their way to Russia, loaded with German industrial machinery and supplies.

When we arrived at our new and regular headquarters in Kielce, we met a very unpleasant and unfriendly Polish population. They hated our Polish Army. They hated the Russians and they were angry at Hitler. Why hadn't he killed all the Jews? There were very few Jews left alive. Hitler had no time to finish them off and so some Jews came out from the woods where they joined the guerrillas fighting against the Germans. Some Polish Jews had survived in Russia because Stalin had exiled them to Russian labor camps in 1940. The Jews who survived the war, even those who owned real estate, didn't want to remain in Poland and settle there.

It was a tragic feeling to be with Polish people who were your enemies and who wanted to bury you alive. They couldn't tolerate the few Jews who survived in hiding or who bravely fought the Nazis. The Poles wanted to kill off all the remaining Jews. The Polish Nationalists organized a guerrilla war against the existing Polish government. They lived in the forests. In heavily wooded areas they built log barricades across the roads throughout the countryside. When trucks from our army or the Russian Army passed by, they attacked and captured whatever supplies were on the trucks. If there was a Jewish soldier among the troops, they tortured him. First they cut off the victim's ears and nose, blinded him and then murdered him. We had to be careful among our own people. Every day we heard about these barbarous attacks.

All the Jews wanted to go to Israel and they crowded into kibbutzim and Zionist organizations in order to leave Poland for Israel. There was a Jewish kibbutz in the city of Kielce where our regiment was stationed. People staying there had left Russia in 1945 and were on their way to Israel. I visited them a few times and gave them some hand guns for protection in case of an attack. But the Polish National Guerrillas (Armia Krajowa: A.K.) couldn't forgive themselves that some Jews were still living. They attacked at night and killed all forty-two Jews who were asleep in the kibbutz, including the chairman of the Committee, Dr. Severyn Kahane. They were shot, stoned to death or killed with axes and blunt instruments. Elsewhere in Kielce, Jews were murdered in their homes or dragged into the streets and killed by the mob. Many of the dead were teenagers on their way to Palestine. Some were released officers from the Polish Army and some were survivors of the Birkenau Concentration Camp. They still had their camp numbers tattooed on their arms.



### **THE LIE IN KIELCE:**

The climax of these post-war killings in Poland came in July 1946. Three days earlier an eight-year-old Polish boy from Kielce, Henryk Blaszyk, disappeared from his home. Two days later, he returned,

claiming that he had been kept in a cellar by two Jews who wanted to kill him and that only a miracle had enabled him to escape. In fact, he had been to the home of a family friend in a nearby village, and the friend had told him what to say upon his return. On July 4, 1946, a crowd of Poles, aroused by rumors that Jews were abducting Christian children for ritual purposes, attacked the homes of the Jews, killing 42 people.

Following the Kielce pogrom one hundred thousand Polish Jews sought asylum and new lives in Palestine, Western Europe, Britain and the United States. At this time I was in Italy, on the way to Palestine.

The Polish Government officially apologized for the pogrom in February 1996. Government officials, and Catholic and Jewish religious leaders commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the bloodshed.



From time to time our regiment sent out an infantry battalion with automatic rifles and machine guns to fight the Polish guerrillas who were camped in the woods. Sometimes they put up a strong opposition, but most of the time they retreated. They gave the soldiers a hard time. It was difficult to fight the guerrillas in the woods.

Right after the war there was no law and order, and there were no police in Polish cities. I was appointed by headquarters to be the Army Commandant of the city of Kielce. I was told to take sixty soldiers with me and open up an army police office (commandanture) in the city of Kielce in order to maintain order. I refused the offer right away so they appointed another sergeant. I didn't want to be a civil commander of those anti-Semitic and brutal Poles. I knew they weren't any good and I surely wouldn't have lasted very long.

A few months later, the National Guerrillas (Armia Krajowa: A.K.) came out of the woods in the middle of the night. They attacked the Commandant, the position that I had been offered and refused. Several soldiers and the guard were killed while they were asleep. The guerrillas took the soldiers' rifles and ammunition and went back into the woods. If I had accepted that position I would have been dead. I started to feel that the anti-Semitism was growing in the army. Some young officers arrived from officer training school. They were very anti-Semitic, and their attitude changed the atmosphere among the troops. Soon the soldiers started to make anti-Semitic remarks to Jewish soldiers, which they would not have dared to do previously.

I didn't feel that I belonged there anymore. I knew that I was in the wrong place. It was nearing the time for my release from the army. In September 1945 everyone my age received a release notice, but I did not get one. I went to headquarters and inquired why. I was told that I was not released because I was listed as an office headquarters officer, a master sergeant. That was a trick that they tried to play on me. Actually, I was a front line officer, not assigned to the office, so I made them change my title to front line officer. This entitled me to be released. I demanded my rights and they responded fairly. They tried to hold me for at least another year in the army, so that I would help them train new young soldiers, but I didn't let them trick me. After I refused their first offer, they kept offering me the opportunity to go to Moscow to enroll in a special officers' school for two years. I could have taken the highest executive post in the government or the army, but I refused that, too. I didn't want to have any part of the ruling Russian Communist government. I saw that it was all very corrupt. The Communist Party leaders were living off the labor of the hard-working people and there was no freedom. People spied on each other and innocent citizens were arrested all the time.

The reason that I volunteered to be in the Russian Army in 1943 was to fight Hitler and his murdering Nazi followers. Millions of innocent people, including my family and relatives, were put to death. I felt that I had an obligation to the innocent victims. My only desire was to see Hitler and his followers defeated and destroyed forever, and these wishes and my obligation had been fulfilled. As soon as the war was over, I didn't want to stay in the army anymore. Even with all of their attractive offers, I had no desire to remain in such hateful surroundings.

In September of 1945 I was released from the army. I was glad to leave. Even though Hitler had been defeated and I was physically healthy, spiritually, I was depleted. As soon as I stepped out of headquarters I was no longer in charge of anyone else, only myself. I had no one to be with and no one to talk to. All of my Polish Army friends that I had been in charge of went home to their families, parents, brothers, sisters, relatives. They were happy to go home to resume a normal life where they grew up. I stood alone, like a wandering Jew. I didn't know where to go. I knew that all the Jews in my town of Bereza Kartuzka- my parents, brothers, sisters, and relatives- were brutally murdered and no one was left. I couldn't go back to that tragic town and be all alone, the only survivor from my family, the only survivor from my town. I felt like a solitary tree in a burned and ravaged forest. I felt very bad.

The Polish government gave me a certificate for a house and ten acres of land in Poland near the German border, land that was taken from the Germans. I refused to accept this. I hated the thought of staying in Poland any longer. I decided to go to Palestine. I could not resettle myself among a population that was still brutally anti-Semitic. Even though the Poles themselves suffered under Hitler, anti-Semitism was rampant. They used to attack the poor innocent remaining Jews who had survived Hitler's crematoriums. Jews were attacked wherever they went; in their houses, in the streets, on the trains. When the Poles recognized a Jew on a train they used to throw him out of the window while the train was moving at full speed. Jewish survivors were hunted down all over Poland. Three hundred and fifty Jews were murdered by the Poles in 1945 after the war was over.

During the entire time that I was in the army fighting Hitler I received letters from my girlfriend, Anna Nicolaievna. She was also in the army on the front fighting against the Germans. We missed each other. After Germany was defeated and the war was over, she wrote and asked me to join her in Russia. I liked her very much, but I was sorry for her and didn't want to break up her home life. She had her whole family in Russia and I knew that I had lost everyone and everything. My loss weighed heavily on me. I had nowhere to go and no one to talk to. I didn't want to stay in Poland where my family had been murdered and I didn't want to go to Communist Russia, even though the Russians had made me several generous offers. I knew that I still had to wander around without a home until I would be able to settle somewhere. Who knew where? I didn't want to put her in the same situation. I thought it would be too hard a life for her. I could not offer her stability and security.

I decided to get out of Poland and go to Palestine/ Israel but the road to Palestine/ Israel was closed to Jews by the English. I saw that I had a great deal of hardship ahead of me. I didn't care about myself. I knew that whatever happened, I would be able to face it. But the thought of taking Anna with me, away from her country and her family, made me feel guilty. I didn't know how to answer her. I didn't want her to suffer the way I would, not knowing where I would live or what I would do. I had become a refugee without anything.

So I did not answer her request to come to Russia, and I regret it even today. Why didn't I explain it to her? She should at least know why I didn't write back. I did it because I loved her and I didn't want her to suffer as I did. I was forced to be alone, but she had a choice to be with her family. I had nothing

left but myself. As I look back on that time, I think my decision was a mistake. I should have written to her and explained my situation. I do not know what she would have decided or done, but in my heart I am sorry.

Before I was released from the army, I spoke with Captain Karasov. I told him that I was thinking of taking a trip to my hometown to see what had happened there, even though I knew that no one was left alive. He said to me, "Harry, don't go. You'll never make it or come out alive." His advice bothered me greatly, but I listened. He knew what was happening. Everywhere people were being murdered, especially Jews. The Poles were killing the Jews so that they could claim their possessions and real estate. A friend of mine, a lieutenant, had been walking in the street. He was shot in the back and died. After the war there were many murders like that all over Poland.

Some Jews returned to their home towns from Russian exile only to find that their homes were occupied by Poles. Usually, the Poles murdered the Jewish owner and kept the house for himself. It was a tragic situation.



**Photograph #7:** Harry Kabran, age thirty, taken in Poland, after being released from the Polish Army in 1945. The photograph was taken for a passport to leave Poland.

# Chapter Thirteen: Italy

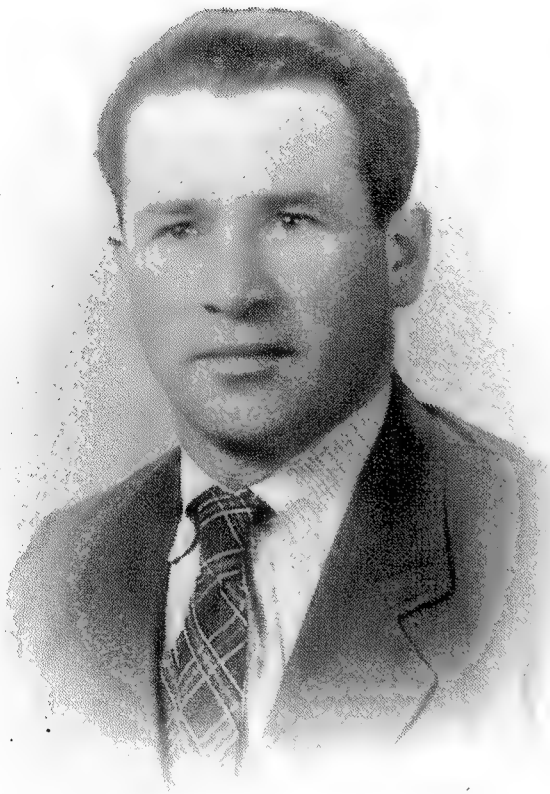
SEPTEMBER 1945 - DECEMBER 1949



Map #9: My journey as a refugee 1945-1949.

I wandered around in Poland for a few weeks. I stopped by one last time to see my friend Captain Karasov. We had a drink together and said our final goodbyes. Then I looked for a way to get out of Poland to go to Israel. An illegal system for transporting Jews from Poland to Italy had been organized, but I had no cash to pay for the journey. I did have an antique 10-ruble gold piece. It was worth a lot of money. I spoke with the organizers and they accepted it as payment for my journey. I had to throw away all of my Polish documents, all the medals of honor I had received for bravery in the war against Hitler, and the photographs of my company while we were in action at the front line. If we were interrogated or faced an inspection at the border I was to say that I was from Greece. The Brecha 2, an Israeli underground group, had organized a large transport of Jews, providing them with counterfeit documents, which established our Greek citizenship. Most of the time, border inspectors accepted graft and allowed





**Photograph #8:** Harry Kabran, taken in Italy in 1948 for a passport to go to Argentina.

the refugees to go through. Although the refugees claimed Greek national origin, they went to Czechoslovakia, then Austria, and finally to Italy where they were kept in a UNRA (United Nations Relief Agency) camp for four years (see Map #9).

I was on a large transport with other Jews. We were all registered as Greek Jewish citizens going back to Greece. The train crossed the border to Czechoslovakia and stopped in Prague and then went on to Vienna, Austria. We stopped in the Rothschilds' Hotel for a few days and then continued on to Salzburg, Austria, close to the Italian border. There was a transit camp here for all of the Jewish people who wanted to go to Palestine. It was supported by the United Jewish Organization. The Brecha were young Israeli soldiers from Palestine who had been in the English Army or were from the USA. These ex-soldiers volunteered for the underground to help transport the remaining Jewish refugees from Europe to Israel. It was very well organized in 1945, immediately after the war. About 300,000 Jews survived the Holocaust and wanted to emigrate to Palestine. Most of the survivors were from the Soviet Union. Hitler had killed most of the Jews in the countries occupied by Germany.

From Salzburg our group was supposed to be transported over the mountains to Italy. Many transports crossed the Italian border on foot, making the difficult passage through the mountains into Italy. The weak were carried by trucks up the mountains to Milano (Milan) where there was another transit camp. I stayed in Milano for one month. From Milano we were transported to Torino (Turin) to a UNRA camp for displaced persons of all nationalities. There were several thousand people at this camp, most of them Jewish. The sleeping quarters consisted of one long room with wooden bunk beds, one on top of the other, just like in the army. We went to the kitchen and stood in line with our pots to receive our meals three times a day. I remained in Torino for two years.

I was in Italy from 1945 to the end of 1949. We were not allowed to work in the country to make a living because there was massive unemployment. Everyone was very anxious and impatiently waiting to go to Israel or some other country to settle down. The Italian people in Milano, Torino and all over the country were very nice and friendly to us, wherever we met them. They gave us a feeling of friendship and care. They were ready to do everything for us with feeling and sympathy because we were refugees without a home or country. In comparison to the vicious Polish people, it was like day and night.

The first year I worked as a guard in the camp for ten dollars a month; enough money to buy a soda on hot days. In 1947 I was ready to go to Palestine on an illegal boat, thanks to the Brecha, but I developed a hernia. I was advised to have an operation before I made the trip to Palestine. I went to the hospital and had the operation. When I came out of the hospital, the boat had already sailed. The English government didn't allow the ship to land on Palestinian soil and diverted the ship to Cypress.

Meanwhile the Jewish organization drew up a registry of all refugees who had relatives in the USA. I told them I had three uncles in New York City: Hyman, Henach, and Michel (Max) Dolgin, and several cousins. My name appeared on the list of survivors in the *Forward*, New York City's Jewish daily paper, and my Uncle Hyman (Herman) saw my name there. From then on I received letters from my uncles and cousins who lived in New York City, especially from my cousins Irving and Pauline Dolgin, and Charlie and Sylvia Dolgin. I also had letters from Bernice Dolgin, Esther and Feige (Mickey) Dolgin and Benny Dolgin. It was very kind of them to write to me. They sent me an affidavit for entry into the USA and I canceled my trip to Israel. There was a quota for immigration to the USA so I had to wait until my name was reached.

At the end of 1947 I had to have a second hernia operation because the first one was unsuccessful. Then we were transported to Ancona, a camp in central Italy. I was there for a year and then transferred again to Barletta, in the southern part of Italy. After leaving Barletta, I went to Bari, a coastal city. There I took a course in deep sea diving through the ORT, (Organization for the Rehabilitation and Training of Children), a Jewish organization which provided training for the residents of the camp. Diving is a good trade, but very dangerous. Meanwhile, I got a letter from Mr. Udeleff, the President of the Berezer Society (a group of survivors from the town of Bereza) in New York. I also received correspondence from the Berezer Society in Argentina. They even sent me a visa for Argentina, but I was waiting for permission to enter the USA where all of my relatives were living.

Finally, after four years in Italy, I got my visa for the USA. I was scheduled to depart from Naples, Italy on December 11, 1949, on the Navy ship *General Greely*. The last month in Italy we were shipped to Banoli, seven and a half miles (twelve km) from Naples. That was the last transit we had in Italy. We had a very nice trip across the ocean. Some people got seasick on the boat, but I was lucky. Most of the time it didn't bother me. Once when I was on the deck we saw a lot of dolphins jumping into the air. It was a sensational sight.



**Photograph #9:** Harry Kabran in Torino (Turin), Italy wearing Army pants and boots. Harry made the top parts of these boots from fine soft leather then he gave them to a shoe-maker to sew onto the soles. The boots were extremely comfortable. Photographed May 1, 1946 and mailed to Irving Dolgin in New York.

## Chapter Fourteen: America

DECEMBER 1949 -



**Photograph #10:** (Standing, left to right) Charles Dolgin, Esther Dolgin, Irving Dolgin  
(Seated, left to right) Molly Dolgin, Max Dolgin, Florence "Mickey" Dolgin. Taken in 1930 or 1931.



**Photograph #11:** (Standing) Bernice Dolgin. (Sitting) Ida Dolgin, Herman "Hymie" Dolgin. This picture was mailed to Harry Kabran when he was in Italy in 1948 after Hymie saw Harry's name listed in the *Forward* as a refugee.



**Photograph #12:** (left to right) Sheila Dolgin Marks, Harry Kabran, Harry Mortman, Max Dolgin, Irving Dolgin, Sam Abrams, Sylvia Dolgin. Taken at a Passover seder in 1950, at Max and Molly Dolgin's apartment on Simpson Street in the Bronx, New York.



**Photograph #13:** (Back) Benjamin "Benny" Dolgin, Diana "Dina" Dolgin. (Front, left to right) Ellen Dolgin, Marcia Dolgin. Taken in 1953.



**Photograph #14:** (top to bottom) Tina Dolgin Rosamofsky, Harry Kabran, Sylvia Dolgin at the same seder.



**Photograph #15:** (top) Irving Dolgin. Bottom (left to right) Herman "Hymie" Dolgin, Max Dolgin at Irving and Pauline Dolgin's apartment on Gleason Avenue in the Bronx. The picture was taken in 1954 at a party to celebrate Max and Molly Dolgin's fiftieth anniversary.



**Photograph #16:** (Top) Pauline Dolgin, Irving Dolgin. (Bottom) Molly Dolgin, Max Dolgin. Taken at a Chomsker Young Men's Benevolent Society affair.



**Photograph #17:** (back row left to right) Tina Dolgin Rosamofsky, Elaine "Lanev" Abrams Schnitzer, Leonard Abrams, Sheila Dolgin Marks. (front row left to right) Adrienne Dolgin, Howard Dolgin, Terry Mortman, Arthur Mortman. Taken at Sam and Esther Abrams' house in Jericho Long Island, New York at Passover Seder in 1954.



**Photograph #18:** Leonard Schnitzer and Elaine "Laney" Abrams Schnitzer.  
Taken in 1957.





**Photograph #19:** (Standing left to right) Harry Mortman, Florence “Mickey” Dolgin Mortman, Sylvia Dolgin, Charles Dolgin, Esther Dolgin Abrams, Sam Abrams. (Seated left to right) Max Dolgin, Molly Dolgin, Pauline Dolgin, Irving Dolgin. Taken in the 1960’s.

We arrived at Ellis Island, New York on December 22, 1949. From there they moved us to New York harbor and we landed. Some of the newcomers were picked up right away by their waiting relatives. The same day I went to the HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), a Jewish organization for newcomers, and made a phone call to my Uncle Hyman in the Bronx. The next day he came to the HIAS office. Even though he didn’t remember me, I recognized him right away in the entrance of HIAS. I remembered Uncle Hyman from Europe. In 1921, when I was only six years old, he left for the United States. He asked me to come visit him and his family.

I took the subway and went to the Bronx and met Aunt Ida and Uncle Hyman and their daughter, my cousin, Bernice. They were busy preparing dinner. They gave me a very warm reception and it was really a very nice reunion.

Later, I met my Uncle Michel (Max), Aunt Mirke (Molly) and their family. They knew my father and mother in Europe. Their daughters Esther and Feige (Florence or “Mickey”) and two sons Irving and Charlie were all lovely people. They also lived in the Bronx. Cousin Irving and Pauline invited me for dinner and I met their two lovely daughters, Sheila and Tina. Cousin Charlie and Sylvia also invited me for dinner and I met their little boy, Howard, and daughter Adrienne. Then I visited cousin Esther and her two children, Leonard and Laney. Cousin Feige (Mickey) lived in Canarsie and had two little boys, Arthur and Terry.

I also met my Uncle Henach, his son Benny, his wife Diana and their two lovely girls, Marcia and Ellen, in Brooklyn. A few days after I arrived in the United States, Uncle Henach gave me the address of my cousins from my father’s side of the family. They lived in Long Beach, Long Island. I called them up and introduced myself on the telephone as we didn’t know each other at all. They invited me for dinner. The next day I took the bus from the HIAS office to Long Beach and my cousin Roz was waiting for me at

the bus stop. We went by car to their home. I met her husband, their two children and my other cousin Abe Corbin. They changed their name from Kabran to Corbin. We had dinner together and discussed the past very briefly. It was not pleasant for me to remember all the details.

After dinner my cousin's husband prepared a bundle of white shirts for me to take home. I thanked him but refused his offer. I didn't need them. I told him that what I needed was a job. I didn't know the language and didn't even know how to look for work in New York City. He owned a factory which manufactured clothing and could have offered me a job in his factory. He said he didn't have a job for me, and didn't want to bother looking around for me either. He told me that he paid \$250.00 a year to the HIAS organization and that they should get me a job. Immediately I knew what type of person I was speaking with. Before I opened the door to say goodbye he tried to push some money into my hand, but I refused to take it. If he had been a person of good will he could have given me a job in his factory, or even better, he could have recommended a place where I could have applied for a job. I was willing to work and able to provide for myself. His brother-in-law, also named Abe Corbin, was working for him as a cutter and was very surprised that I caught on to his character the first time I met him. My cousin Abe was a nice man, and he was glad that I refused to take the little things from his brother-in-law. I belittled him in the way he deserved. My cousin's husband, the manufacturer, was born in Warsaw, Poland and believed that money is everything, even more important than morals. I believe exactly the opposite.

After waiting in the HIAS office for seven days, I received a visit from Danny Kroogman. Danny is the cousin of my friend Kalman Gutterman and is also a landsman (person from the same area). He grew up in a small village near Bereza but he immigrated to the United States before the war. He gave me a recommendation for a job as a sewing machine operator in a shoe factory. I accepted the offer and worked on piece-work. Although I did not make very much money, it was better than being unemployed. When I started to work, my Aunt Mirke (Molly) and Uncle Michel (Max) invited me to room with them. I accepted their offer appreciatively. I ate supper with them and paid them a little money. It was good for me to be there. It made me feel like I was in the family.

A few months later, I moved closer to my job in Brooklyn. I worked in the shop because I had to make a living, but I did not like sitting indoors at the machine in a dark and dusty factory for eight hours a day. After a day's work I had so much pain in my back that I could not stand up straight.

At that time I ate in a restaurant cafeteria. In 1952, after two years of living this way, I got sick with sharp cramps in my stomach. The cramps were so bad that I could not move. I was forced to lay face down on the floor for ten minutes until the pain went away. I didn't go to a doctor because I understood that something was wrong with the cafeteria food I was buying. I was eating too much fat, red meat and food filled with junk. I went to the library and looked for some books on how to adopt a healthful lifestyle. My first book was *Life Starts at 40* by Gaylord Hauser. I read several other books on eating properly, followed their advice, and returned to health. Since that time I have continued reading books about diet and health. I learned to take care of myself and my health gradually improved. I eliminated red meat, fat, sugar and salt from my diet. My diet consists mostly of grains, beans, leafy green vegetables, and fresh fruits. I also included fish and lean chicken with the skin and fat completely trimmed off. I engaged in aerobic exercise such as walking, running, and swimming. I did stretching exercises and yoga exercise to keep in good shape.

On New Year's Eve, 1956, my friend Kalman Gutterman, who lived on Long Island, visited me in Brighton Beach. He happened to mention that he was working as a handyman and his employer was looking for a laborer. The pay was \$1.65 an hour. Even though I was making more money than that, I took the laborer's job. I was sick and tired of being a sewing machine operator and I hated shop work.

The next day I called my boss in the shop and told him that I was quitting. I went to Hicksville, Long Island where my friend Kalman was working for a builder, constructing houses in large developments. I was much happier and healthier working outdoors. In 1956, after seven months as a laborer, I became a carpenter. I joined the Carpenters' Brotherhood Union in Nassau County, doing carpentry work, and building homes, stores and bridges. I worked shorter hours, got paid more, and I was not in a dusty shop. I was much better off. In 1958 my boss asked me to go with him to work in Plattsburg, New York. The job was forty miles from the Canadian border, building a development of single family houses right on the edge of Lake Champlain. I accepted it and worked there for two years, from 1958 to 1959. When the development was completed I came back to New York and found a job in the Bronx. The shop made cabinets and store fixtures.

I didn't like working in this shop because I was breathing the dust and fumes from the chemicals which they used for polishing the cabinets. After seven weeks I quit that job and went back to work on Long Island, building single family homes. I liked that job because it was physical and I was working outdoors for only thirty-five hours a week.

I took an apartment in Hicksville, Long Island, where the Nassau Brotherhood of Carpenters' Union had their offices. I lived in Hicksville for one year. It was close to my job but I was very lonely. After work I had no one to talk with and share ideas. I moved to Coney Island where I had friends that I had known for a long time. I took an apartment half a block from the beach and boardwalk. I met a lot of people walking there. Even though it took me three hours to get to work and back each day, I didn't mind it. I felt like I belonged there, by the beach.

In 1962 I was working on a new church building in Massapequa, Long Island. One day while I was working on the roof, I slipped, fell, and landed on the curb and sidewalk, twenty feet below. I landed with my feet down on the sidewalk, and turned over with my back on the curb. I was unconscious and couldn't talk for awhile. The ambulance took me to East Meadow Hospital where they took X-rays. I was very badly bruised internally, on the chest and all over, especially my back and under my right arm where I hit the curb. My head was bleeding- I think my hammer struck me as I fell. I could not straighten myself because of the pain. My whole back was painful and I was unable to stand up straight.

They asked me about my financial situation and whether I had a family to take care of me. I told them that I was insured through the union and that this was a workman's compensation case. I also told them that I had no money, no family and that I lived by myself. They didn't like hearing that. The lady with whom I spoke became quite angry. She told me that if something happened to me or if I died, they would be responsible. Therefore they did not want to become involved in my case and refused to let me stay in their hospital. I argued with them and asked them to allow me to stay for just one day, but they refused me even this. They said, "Take your car and drive home. If you feel like you can't drive home, go to another hospital." Then the police guard pushed me out the door.

I was crippled and couldn't drive, so I called a taxi to take me to Coney Island, thirty-five miles (fifty-five km) away. The behavior of the hospital management was unforgivable and outrageous. If I were financially well off and had a family to take care of me, they would have accepted me into their hospital, but a poor man was as good as a dead man.

When I came home I asked a specialist to install a hook and rope in the ceiling over my bed that was low enough for me to reach so I would be able to lift myself out of bed. I could not raise myself up because the muscles in my back were injured and very painful. I was able to hold onto the rope, pull myself up and get out of bed. A few days later, my foreman delivered my car to me in Coney Island from the accident site.

I went to a doctor, Dr. Stern, in Coney Island. He took X-rays and said that I had bruised the inside of my chest and back under the right arm. He gave me heat treatments in his office a few times a week. He declared me disabled and unable to work. The insurance compensation paid him for the treatments he gave me. After five weeks, I came to his office for a treatment. He told me that he had informed the insurance company that I was able to return to work. He hadn't even consulted with me before making his report. I argued that I was still sick, still in pain and couldn't straighten my back or walk straight. He didn't want to talk to me and shut the door in my face. He probably got some money under the table from the insurance company. I had to get a lawyer to get the case reviewed.

I went to another clinic. Their X-rays showed that I was still bruised and they acknowledged my disability. I was really very badly disabled for about two years thereafter. I was suffering with pain all over. Frequently, the state doctors examined me and acknowledged my disability.

Like my doctor, my lawyer did not help me or work for me. He gave me bad advice and did everything that was against my interests. Rather, he did everything on behalf of the insurance company (AETNA). It happened that he and the insurance company's lawyer were friends. He was probably offered money from the insurance company, to lower the amount of my compensation.

He pressed me to take an easy job, with light work, even though I could not do it. I took a job that the employment office got me, but I found that I could not do it. I got dizzy and had headaches, so I quit. The lawyer kept "squeezing me" each time I visited him. But I was naive and could not perceive that he would handle my case this way. He treated me mercilessly and pressured me to settle. That was no way to treat a sick, injured man.

Finally I agreed to settle the case because it was weighing on my nerves. The lawyer was driving me crazy. He called me into his office and said that he was going to ask the insurance company for \$2,000 compensation for my disability. I was shocked and I refused. I had been unable to work for two years, and I was still sick and incapacitated. My head ached, I had pains in my back, and I was still broken up. I asked if he were in my shoes would he settle for that sum of money. He didn't say a word. I walked out of his office. He called me back and said that he would ask for \$3,000. I made a mistake then. I okayed it because I was disturbed, depressed and very nervous. I had hired a lawyer to help me but in the end he only squeezed me into settling for a minute sum of money. I soon realized that the less I got, the more he would get from the insurance company. I was so disturbed that I settled foolishly. I got the \$3,000 compensation which was nothing in light of my injury and disability. I still couldn't work, was fully in pain, and very weak. But I never gave up.

I got a job through the union. They sent me to a job on Long Island building stores in an industrial shopping center. I was weak and felt a great deal of pain all over my body, but I continued to work. I didn't give up. I was sweating as if I were in a steam room. The foreman used to come over and ask me, "What is the matter with you? Why are you sweating so much? You are the only one who is sweating." I didn't tell him my story but kept on going even though I felt like I would have to quit. I pushed myself to get back in shape, and in about two weeks I was able to handle the work. From time to time I still got headaches, but I found out that the more I worked the more my condition improved. After a while I was able to work as I did before the accident.

From that accident I experienced first-hand the inhumane behavior and abuse that needy people endure from greedy lawyers, doctors, insurance companies and hospitals. They have no pity or compassion. They see only the almighty dollar. Later on I found out from lawyers that I should have claimed \$40,000 for my condition, but by that time, it was too late.

I continued to work on Long Island, driving over 100 miles a day, from home to work and back. After work I spent my leisure time walking with my friends on the beach, only a half a block from my home. As usual in the winter time, the work in construction became slow. In 1965 I planned a trip, driving my own car to Central America, taking my time. A friend who used to play hand ball with me joined me, but he didn't drive. We took off from Coney Island, Brooklyn on January 10, 1965, and arrived in Mexico City five days later. We stayed two weeks, exploring the city. We visited the wonderful Jewish Center in Mexico City. It was beautiful and a very nice organization. From there we traveled to Cuernavaca, a resort town fifty miles from Mexico City. I remember that on the way it started snowing very heavily. The Mexican drivers were not used to driving in it because it seldom snows there. They all pulled over to the side and stopped, waiting until the snow storm ended. But I was used to driving in the snow up north, and so I continued on, while the Mexicans looked at me very oddly. We arrived in Cuernavaca without an accident. We stayed in a motel there for three months. I watched the way the people lived. There are two categories; very rich and very poor. The poor people work hard to make a living and the rich have a luxurious life style. I got sick for a while when I was there. I had a high fever and dysentery and went to the hospital. I got a shot of penicillin and the illness passed.

From there I drove to Guatemala, which is a more agricultural land. While I was driving through the country, I had to fill up the radiator in my car with water. I stopped at a place in the countryside and asked for some water. The man was Italian, very kind and friendly, and gave me the water. He told me to be careful, that the Guatemalan people hated American people for certain reasons. We stayed there a few days and I drove on to Honduras, San Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. I stopped in the capital city, San Jose, because the main highway I had been driving on since I started in New York came to an end. To go farther on to Panama and Costa Rica, I would have had to load up the car on a train for sixty miles to connect with another road. I didn't want to do that, so I stayed in San Jose. It was a nice city with friendly people who spoke Spanish and English. I got along with the people very well. The food, the fruit and vegetables were excellent, and the meat also, much better than in Mexico. The temperature is about 75 degrees all year round. I visited the Jewish Center in San Jose; the people were very nice and very friendly. I had an offer to stay in the city, but I didn't like the ashes that constantly fell from the nearby volcano, about five miles from the city. The city was covered with ashes every day. The ashes covered my car and I had to clean it constantly. I figured it wasn't healthy to remain in such a place.

After staying there for three months, enjoying the good weather, nice people and good food, I decided to return to the United States myself, without my companion. The entire way, ever since I started the trip, he annoyed me constantly. He became very jealous of me and angry all the time. I didn't know why, but I knew that when you are driving a car angry and upset you may have an accident. I finally asked him, "Joe, why do you behave like that?" He finally told me about five things that were true. He said that I was a top sergeant in the army and he was only a plain soldier. I was taller than him. I had a better job, with better pay and could work outside in the fresh air, and he had to work in a shop. I drove a car, and he didn't. He also thought I probably had more money than he did. He said I was better than him in every way, except that he thought he was healthier. He also couldn't understand the Spanish that was spoken in Mexico and Costa Rica. I understood Italian, so it was easier for me to understand the Spanish language and to converse with people. He was like a dummy all the time, because he couldn't talk, and that burned in him, even though I gave him a free ride. He left and later I learned that he went from Costa Rica to Los Angeles and Long Beach, California by himself. He was a loner.

I returned home the way I came, through Nicaragua, Honduras, San Salvador, and Guatemala. In Guatemala I bought a ferry ticket to cross to Florida with the car. I didn't want to drive all the way, so I cut the trip short. While I was at the ferry, five policemen surrounded the car and declared that I was under arrest. They didn't even want to see my documents. They all got in my car and I had to drive to the

Army Commandant. There I showed my documents and my ferry ticket to the United States to the head of the commandant. They let me go free. They thought I was a spy. I returned to the ferry, they loaded up the car, and in two days I was in Miami, Florida. I stopped there for a week to see my friend Shlomo Benhari. I drove back to Brooklyn and arrived there on July 10th, 1965, exactly six months after I left.

In 1978 I was 62 years old, entitled to early retirement and so I stopped working. Meanwhile, my neighborhood in Coney Island was changing. It became unsafe to live there or to go out of the house. Many people were getting mugged on the boardwalk and the beach. The weak and elderly who came out for a leisurely walk or a rest were the usual victims. The muggers, in groups of three and four, attacked them, beat them up, and robbed them of their belongings.



**Photograph #20:** Harry Kabran with German Shepherd dog, Skinny, on the beach at Coney Island, Brooklyn, New York City. Picture taken in 1978.

In 1977 I found a German Shepherd dog who was living in the streets and starving. He was just skin and bones. I took him in, fed him and called him Skinny. From then on he was very loyal and always protected me. I often saw crimes being committed on the boardwalk while we were walking. People were mugged for the few dollars that they carried in their pockets. I used to let my dog loose to chase the robbers away and set the victims free. It happened a number of times and I was very proud of my dog. I kept Skinny for five years and loved him very much but when I left for Florida I had to give him away to my friend.



**Photograph #21:** Charles Dolgin and Harry Kabran. August 15, 1990, Del Rey Beach, Florida.

I liked Coney Island very much, but unfortunately it became unbearable for the residents. In 1982 I decided to leave for Florida. I bought a condominium in Del Rey Beach to live leisurely and without fear. It was six miles from the Atlantic Ocean, where my good friend, Daniel Kroogman lived with his cousin, Kalman Gutterman.

Despite my trials and sufferings and the life-threatening situations I endured, I never gave up. I survived to enjoy my life in good health in King's Point, Del Rey Beach, Florida.

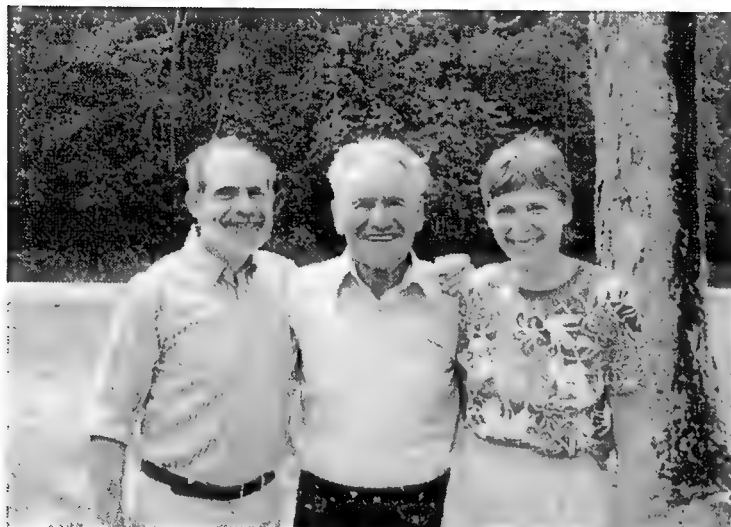


**Photograph #22 :** Harry Kabran, Charles Dolgin, Howard Dolgin. August 1990, Del Rey Beach, Florida.



**Photograph #23:** Harry Kabran in his condominium, Del Rey Beach, Florida, August 1995.





**Photograph #24:** (left to right) Howard Dolgin, Harry Kabran, Trudy Dolgin. August 1993 at Lipkowitz Bungalow Colony in Ferndale, New York.

**Photograph #25:** (left to right) Howard Dolgin, Harry Kabran and Daniel Kroogman at Lipkowitz Bungalow Colony in Ferndale, New York, August 1993.



**Photograph #26:** Harry Kabran in the kitchen of his bungalow at Lipkowitz Bungalow Colony in Ferndale, New York, August 1993.



# Epilogue

I learned one critical lesson: the important thing in life is to win. I fought against Hitler and he was defeated. It is impossible to forget the destruction of the six million Jews by the Nazis and Nazi sympathizers in Poland and in other countries. Despite the brutal behavior of the majority of Poles towards the Jews, there were many Poles who saved the lives of Jewish people and showed up as righteous gentiles during World War II. Many of the French population were also kind to the Jews despite the fact that the French government was a puppet of the Third Reich. The Italian government tried to protect the Jews in Italy. Finland made a pact with Germany concerning the safety of the Finnish Jews. King Boris of Bulgaria died at the hands of the Nazis for ensuring the survival of the Jews in his realm. And there was the heroism of the Danes. The protection that some Jews received during World War II was heroic, great and unforgettable.

Throughout my life I have learned several lessons. They are important and worth remembering:

- 1) Foresee life-threatening situations ahead of time.
- 2) When in a difficult or life-threatening situation, do not delay, immediately make plans to get to safety.
- 3) Do not rely on someone else.
- 4) Be positive and do not give up.
- 5) Know yourself and know your friends and enemies.
- 6) Fight for life and be a winner.
- 7) Do not rely on doctors.
- 8) Prevention is your best medicine.
- 9) You are what you eat.
- 10) Keep your image, and spiral upward.
- 11) There is no other time to live than now. Do it now.  
If not now, then when?

# Time Line

**1680** Jews moved to Bereza in 1680. Leon Sapha, the local ruler, Litwanian Prince and “Hetman” (a high officer in the army) allowed the establishment of a synagogue in Bereza. He also allowed the Jews to build houses and gave them the same rights as Jews living in other towns under his sovereignty.

Prince Leon Sapha also built a monastery for Cartesian monks (named for the French philosopher René Descartes) near Bereza in the late 1600’s. Bereza is often referred to as Kartuzka-Bereza because of the Cartesian monastery.

**1766** According to a census there were 242 Jews living in Bereza.

**1795** Bereza, and much of western Poland, taken over by Tsarist Russia.

**1820’s** Henach (Henry) and Esther Dolgin, and Gershon Warhoftic, who were my maternal great-grandparents, born. Name of Gershon’s wife not known.

**1840’s** Abraham Isaac Dolgin (my maternal grandfather) born.

**1850’s** Feige Hannah Dolgin (my maternal grandmother) born.

**1855-1881** Tsar Alexander II made some attempts to eliminate the abuses of Russian society.

**1870’s** Abraham and Feige Hannah Dolgin married.

**1877** Henach (Henry) Dolgin, my mother’s brother, born.

**1879** Benjamin Kabran, my father, born.

**1882** Sheine Gitel Dolgin Kabran, my mother, born.

**1883, April 17** Michel (Max) Dolgin, my mother’s brother, born.

**1884, April 15** Mirka (Mollie) Friedman Dolgin, Uncle Max’s wife born.

**1884** Shmerl Dolgin, my mother’s brother, born.

**1881** Tsar Alexander II assassinated. His son, Alexander III, became Tsar.

**1881-1894** Tsar Alexander III was very repressive. Life for the Jews was extremely difficult under Alexander III. “Pogroms” (riots organized against Jews) broke out throughout Russia. From 1881 until the beginning of World War I in 1914, almost one third of the Jews living in Eastern Europe immigrated to North and South America.

**1890’s** A large Russian Army camp was established near Bereza. The Warsaw to Moscow Railroad, which passed within five miles of Bereza, was built.

**1894** Nachman Dolgin, my mother’s brother, born.

**1897** The population of Bereza was 5826 people: 2626 Jews, 2600 Slavs (White Russians), and 600 Catholics (Poles).

**1897** Sara Leah Dolgin Press, my mother's sister, born.

**1900** Hyman (Herman) Dolgin, my mother's brother, born.  
Henach (Henry) Dolgin left Europe and came to New York City.

**1902** Michel (Max) Dolgin left Europe and came to New York City on the *S.S. Patria*.

**1904** Molly Friedman Dolgin, my Uncle Michel's wife, came to America.

**1904-1905** Japan defeated Russia in Russo-Japanese War.

**1906** Abraham Joshua Kabran, my oldest brother, born.

**1907, September 12** Irving Dolgin born.

**1909** Abraham Isaac and Feige Hannah Dolgin moved their family to Bereza.

**1909** Esther Kabran, my older sister, born.

**1909, July 24** Esther Dolgin Abrams born.

**1910, April 1** Benjamin Dolgin, son of Henach Dolgin, born.

**1911** Gershon Kabran, my brother, born.

**1913** Adel Kabran, my sister, born.

**1914, January 17** Charles Dolgin born.

**1914-1920** My father, Benjamin Kabran, served in the Russian Army.

**1914-1919** World War I. During the war many battles were fought near our house, along the Warsaw-Moscow road. The bombing killed people and destroyed their homes. Farmers were unable to plant and harvest crops, while hungry soldiers stole what little food the people had.

**1915** Bereza was occupied first by the German Army and then by the army of Germany's ally, Austria-Hungary.

**1915, March 3** Harry Kabran born.

**1917, March** The Russian Revolution began and Tsar Nicholas II abdicated. The Provisional Government took over and continued to fight the war.

**1917, November** The Russian people were opposed to the First World War because of the large number of casualties in the army and the suffering of the general population. Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized power from the Provisional Government on a platform of “bread to the people and peace with Germany.”

**1918, March 3** The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed. Russia ceased fighting and gave control of most of Eastern Europe, including Bereza, to Germany.

**1919** World War I ended with The Peace of Paris. As part of this treaty, land was taken from the former German, Austrian, and Russian Empires to form several independent nations. Bereza became part of the newly-created Poland.

**1920, May 3** Polish Independence Day.

**1920-1922** The Bolshevik Government in Russia attacked Poland and tried to recover land lost during World War I. Poland not only retained the disputed territory but acquired new lands along its eastern border.

**1921** Hyman Dolgin called to serve in the Polish Army. He left Poland and immigrated to the United States.

**1921** Feige Hannah Dolgin, my grandmother, died.

**1922, November 28** Florence (Mickey) Dolgin Mortman born.

**1922** The Bolsheviks changed the name of Russia to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R. or Soviet Union).

**1923, September 28** Abraham Isaac Dolgin, my grandfather, died.

**1930** My family moved into our new brick house in Bereza.

**1933** I opened my own shoemaking shop.

**1937, March** I was called to military training by the Polish Army.

**1938, September 30** My military unit was sent to Cieszyn on the Czechoslovakian border.

**1938, December** I returned home from the army.

**1939, March 23** I was again mobilized into the Polish Army.

**1939, September 1** Germany attacked Poland along the entire border.

**1939, September 18** I was captured by the German Army outside of Warsaw and taken to Stalag 1A near Koenigsberg, which is now called Kaliningrad.

**1940, May 20** After eight months as a prisoner, I escaped from the Germans and made my way back to Bereza.

**1940, June 20** I arrived in Bereza after walking 400 miles.

**1940, late June** I was arrested by the Russian secret police and put in prison for nine months.

**1941 February** I was put on a train and sent to a labor camp in the Russian far north, near Archangelsk.

**1941, June 23** The German Army entered Bereza.

**1941, December 5** General Sikorski of the Polish Government in exile met with Stalin in Moscow to free all Polish prisoners who were in Russian prisons and labor camps.

**1942, Spring** After over a year in the Russian labor camp, I was released. I went to Tambov and worked in a flour mill.

**1942, June** In Bereza, the Germans divided the Jews into two ghettos. Ghetto A was for "productive" Jews who were able to work, and Ghetto B was for the old and sick.

**1942, July 15** In Bereza, Jews from Ghetto B were rounded up and taken by wagon to the woods near Bronna Gora. There, along with 90,000 Jews from other towns, they were shot and buried in ditches.

**1942, October 15-16** The German Army surrounded Ghetto A in Bereza. Some Jews committed suicide, some fled unsuccessfully, and some fought back with small weapons. The survivors were driven to a hill five miles away, shot and buried in ditches.

**1943, July** I enlisted in the Russian Army and was sent to the Front. I was wounded in a battle near Kirova, which is southeast of Moscow.

**1943, September** Once again I was sent to the Front, this time in the reconstituted Polish Army, fighting alongside the Russians. I was assigned to the 120 mm Mortar Battery under Captain Vasil Karasov.

**1943, September 25** Russian Army took Smolensk.

**1943, November 6** Russian Army took Kiev.

**1944, July 24** Our army entered Lublin, about a mile and a quarter from the labor/ extermination camp at Majdanek.

**1944, July 29** The Russian and Polish Armies approached Warsaw, which was occupied by the Germans. Polish uprising began. General Berling invaded Warsaw without the Russian Army.

**1944, October 2** Polish uprising put down by the German Army.

**1945, January 18** The Polish and Russian Armies crossed the frozen Vistula River and attacked Warsaw.

**1945, April 26** Our army attacked the Germans at Stettin and pursued them as they fled to Berlin.

**1945, April 30** We liberated 3,000 women at the Ravensbruck concentration camp.  
**1945, May 8** The Russian and Polish Armies reached the River Elbe and met the American Army.  
**1945, June** My regiment was assigned to Kielce.  
**1945, September** I was released from the Polish Army and taken by an Israeli underground group through Czechoslovakia and Austria to Italy.  
**1946, July 4** Jews killed by Poles in Kielce.  
**1945-1949** I lived in refugee camps in Italy.  
**1948, January 9** Chashe Henah Dolgin, wife of Henach Dolgin died.  
**1949, December 11-22** I sailed from Italy and entered New York City through Ellis Island.  
**1951, May 15** Henach Dolgin, my uncle, died.  
**1956** I quit working indoors and began working as a laborer and carpenter building houses.  
**1962** I was injured falling off the roof of a church we were building.  
**1965, January 10-July 10** I drove through Mexico and Central America on a vacation.  
**1968, January 17** Benjamin Dolgin, son of Henach Dolgin, died.  
**1969, October 30** Irving Dolgin died.  
**1970, May 27** Max Dolgin died.  
**1971, April 18** Mollie Dolgin died.  
**1978** I retired.  
**1982** I moved to Del Rey Beach in Florida.  
**1986, April 27** Esther Dolgin Abrams died.  
**1986, May 31** Florence Dolgin Mortman died.  
**1992, December 19** Charles Dolgin died.  
 1998, June 4 Harry Kabran died Age 83

# Members of My Family Who Perished in the Holocaust

Name	Relationship	Year of Birth
Benjamin Kabran	My Father	1879
Sheine Gitel Kabran	My Mother	1882
Abraham Joshua Kabran	My Brother	1906
Gitel Kabran	My Brother Abraham Joshua's Wife	1909
Esther Friedman	My Sister	1909
Moishe Friedman*	My Sister Esther's Husband	1911
Leible Friedman	My Sister Esther's Son (died age 2 1/2)	1939
Gershon Kabran	My Brother	1911
Adel Kabran	My Sister	1913
Nachman Dolgin	My Mother's Brother	1894
Freida Dolgin	My Uncle Nachman's Wife	1897
Judel Dolgin	My Uncle Nachman's Son	1919
Feige Hannah Dolgin	My Uncle Nachman's Daughter	1921
Esther Dolgin	My Uncle Nachman's Daughter	1923
Sara Leah Press	My Mother's Sister	1897
Ya' acov Moshe Press	My Aunt Sara Leah's Husband	1894
Gershon Press*	My Aunt Sara Leah's Son	1919
Shimshol Press*	My Aunt Sara Leah's Son	1921
Velie Goldstein	Abraham Isaac Dolgin's Brother Yussel's (Joseph) Daughter	1895
Miriam Goldstein**	Velie's Daughter	1920
David Goldstein**	Velie's Son	
Shmerl Dolgin***	My Mother's Brother	1884

\* *I don't know if they are alive.*

Moishe Friedman - there were two Moishe Friedmans in our town. According to the records, one is alive, but I do not know which one.

I don't know if Gershon and Shimshol are alive. They lived in the town of Rozany about 30 miles (47 km) away from Bereza.

\*\* I don't know what happened to Velie Goldstein's children.

\*\*\* Shmerl Dolgin lived in Russia in the town of Constantinovka in the Ukraine. He had two sons. My family used to correspond with him before the Second World War in the 1930's. I do not know if his two sons are still living.

Harry found peace in nature and loved his little Yoga song/mantra. It evoked Harry's cheerful spirit and love for everything natural— including the rhythm of the heart beating. He often sang it to his wife Rochelle.

*Listen; listen to your heart song.*

*I will never forget you.*

*I will never forsake you.*



**Photograph #27:** Rochelle Kutner Kabran, wife of Harry Kabran,  
Del Rey Beach, Florida, February, 1998



## Family Notes

## **Family Notes**

## Family Notes

## What Is Our Last Name: A Mystery?

### Abraham Isaac Dolgin's Gravestone



Translation (from The Survivor, Page 19)

פֶּה  
Here is buried

אִישׁ זָקֵן וְיֹשֵׁר  
An Old and Honest Man

תָּמִים בְּמַעֲשָׁיו וְנֹהֵגָה  
Innocent In his actions enjoying

מִיָּגִיעַ כְּפֹ הַנִּכְבָּד מ  
His Work The Honorable M

אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק  
Abraham Izak

בֶּר חֲנוּךְ הַלֹּוִי זֶל  
The son of the deceased Hanoch Levi

דַּאֲלֵגִי  
Dalgee

נִפְטָר יָג תְּשֵׁרִי שְׁנָת  
Passed away on 5/10/1922

תְּרַפָּג תְּנַצְבָּה  
May his soul be bound up in the bond of life.

The letters ת.נ.צ.ב.ה. are customarily put at the bottom of a gravestone. These letters are an acronym for the Hebrew words תהא נפשו/ה צרורה בצרור החיים (t'hay nafsho/ah tzrurah b'tzror hachaim), "May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life." This paraphrases the words that Abigail told King David (I Samuel 25:29): "But my lord's soul shall be bound in the bond of life with the L-rd your G-d."

There are several spelling mistakes in the Hebrew writing on the gravestone. It is possible that the gravestone writers were not skilled in writing Hebrew. The name on the gravestone (/Dalgee/) might be correct or it might be an approximation.

The correct Hebrew spellings are shown below:

פ"נ

Here is buried

איש זקן וישר

An Old and Honest Man

תמים במעשיו ונהנה

Innocent In his actions enjoying

מיגיע כפו הנכבד

His Work The Honorable M

אברהם יצחק

Abraham Izak

בן חנוך הלוי ז"ל

The son of the deceased Hanoach Levi

דאלגי

Dalgy

"Dalgee" (Hard "G")

נפטר יג תשרי שנת

תרפ"ג

5/10/1922

Day/Month/Year

Thursday, 5th of Oct 1922

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

May his soul be bound up in the bond of life

## What Is Our Last Name: A Mystery?

Irving Dolgin's Birth Certificate lists his name as Isidor Dolka.

Charles Dolgin's Birth Certificate lists his name as Charles Dolgy. The "g" is a hard "g" as in /gun/. "Dolgy" "Dalgee"

On the 1920 Federal Census, Max and Mollie Dolgin's family name is listed as "Dolkin".

Dolka and Dolgy are similar in sound and are similar to the name on Abraham Yitzhak Dolgin's gravestone: "Dalgee".

There is a letter "n" in Hebrew 1. There is no "j" or soft "g" in Hebrew.

The word "Dalgee" is a Russian word that means "long" as in a "long time". It is pronounced /Dalgee/ with a "hard g" as in /gun/.

In a letter from Harry Kabran to Howard Dolgin dated 11, 13, 94, Harry wrote:

"The mystery picture [See Page 19] is my mother, Sheine Gitel, and her brother Nachman at the gravestone of our grandfather, Abraham Isaac Dalgee. Yes, it's missing the "n". In Russian, Dalgee means "long". Someone in our family, probably Uncle Henach, on arriving to the United States, changed it to "Dolgin" so it would sound nicer. Many people did that when they arrived from Europe."

According to Harry Kabran's letter of November 13, 1994, Charles Dolgin's birth certificate, Irving Dolgin's birth certificate, and the inscription on Abraham Isaac's gravestone, it is possible that the original last name is Dalgee and not Dolgin.